PARTISAN REVIEW

VOLUME XI
1944

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THIS ISSUE:

WYLIE SYPHER, of the English department at Simmons College, is the author of a book on slavery in the 18th century. . . . PAUL VALERY, whose criticism and poetry has been translated into many languages, is presumed to be somewhere in Nazi-occupied France. . . . ISAAC ROSENFELD is a young Chicago writer who is now on the editorial staff of *The New Republic*. . . . ERNEST NAGEL is in the department of philosophy at Columbia University. . . . W. C. WILLIAMS, the well-known poet and novelist, practices medicine at Rutherford, N. J. . . . KARL SHAPIRO will publish a new volume of poetry early in 1944. He is in the Medical Corps of the U. S. Army and at present stationed somewhere in the Pacific. . . . RICHARD V. CHASE, of the English department at Columbia University, was among the contributors to "The New Failure of Nerve" series. . . . ROBERT PENN WARREN, whose second novel, *At Heaven's Gate,* was published in the summer of 1943, is now teaching at the University of Minnesota. . . . F. O. MATTHIESSEN, professor of English at Harvard, is the author of *American Renaissance* and other critical works. . . . JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY, widely known as an art critic, will shortly publish a study of T. S. Eliot's *4 Quartets*. . . . ROBERT MOTHERWELL is a young painter from the West Coast now living in New York City. . . . RANDALL JARRELL, author of *Blood for a Stranger,* is now serving in the air force of the U. S. Army. . . . HAROLD ROSENBERG, a frequent contributor to PARTISAN REVIEW, has recently published a volume of verse entitled *Trance Above the Streets*. . . . JAMES BURNHAM is the author of *The Managerial Revolution* and *The Machiavellians*. . . . GEORGE ORWELL is the London correspondent of PARTISAN REVIEW. . . . JEAN STAFFORD is a young writer whose first novel will shortly be brought out by Harcourt, Brace. . . . EDMUND WILSON, who now writes the book-page for the *New Yorker,* is at work on a study of the Russian classics. . . . F. W. DUPEE, formerly on the editorial staff of PARTISAN REVIEW, is in the English department at Columbia University. . . . REBECCA PITTS, a young writer from Indianapolis, has published critical work in many periodicals.

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The Metaphysicals and the Baroque

Wylie Sypher

THE lodestone of modern criticism of poetry, as well as of the practice of poetry itself, is the passage in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* suggesting that the poetic imagination balances or reconciles opposite or discordant qualities. Coleridge's emphasis upon an imaginative *discordia concors,* the opposition of impulses within a poem, has stimulated a criticism that is always seeking out or wondering at complexities, ambiguities, tensions, and the shifts in tone associated with irony. If a sense of these is not evoked from the reader, the poem is suspected of approaching the oversimplified, the naive, the sentimental, the pretty.

The supposition has been, since T. S. Eliot became a force in verse and the evaluation of verse, that this tortuous and even tortured progress is akin to the "metaphysical" poetry of the seventeenth century, and of John Donne in particular. Many poets like Ransom, MacLeish, Tate, Frost, Edith Sitwell, and Eliot himself have been identified with the "metaphysical." The reputation of Donne, in fact, has for a time overborne that of Milton, who is at the moment recovering a little from the slurs of T. S. Eliot and those who have complained that Milton writes an artificial language and is forever in danger of tumbling from his poetic "elevation." Roused by Eliot's remarks upon Milton's verse, Sir Herbert Grierson, Charles Williams, E. M. W. Tillyard, and C. S. Lewis have had the daring to protest. The tacit opposition into which Donne and Milton have been thrown, and the simultaneous expansion of Donne's and shrinkage of Milton's reputations, more and more seem to have been a critical aberration. C. S. Lewis, in particular, has raised issues that bear upon today's poetry and criticism of poetry. A reaction against Donne seems to be under way in criticism, though not (yet?) in verse itself.

What seems not to have been stressed is that Donne and Milton

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alike belong in a tradition that can be identified as baroque. Eliot's opposition between the "wit" and the "magniloquence" of the seventeenth century is misleading. Donne and Milton are but two manifestations of the mannerism that can likewise be seen in the painting of Caravaggio, El Greco, the Poussins, or Rubens. In spite of notable essays by Wölfflin, Fokker, and others, and the comments of Mario Praz, Geoffrey Scott, Austin Warren, and Sacheverell Sitwell, surprisingly little has been done to interpret the baroque, the complexity of which seems not to be generally understood. What modern critics of poetry, especially, have done is to isolate Donne and his "metaphysical" behavior from the behavior of the body of the seventeenth-century writers, painters, sculptors, and architects. We have talked about only one seventeenth-century "manner" yet have presumed that we are somehow attuned to that variously mannered century. Thus our professed admiration of Donne is in a sense hollow and affected, and our depreciation of Milton wilful. The fact is that Milton is more characteristic of his century than Donne, and that a defense of Milton can be extended to even other grounds than the very good ones upon which Williams, Tillyard, and Lewis have built. If we understand the baroque, it is questionable tactic to elevate Donne at the expense of Milton.

Our attraction to the "metaphysical" springs rather from our own restless sensibility than from any wide rapport with the seventeenth century, which is as often "mannered" in the flamboyant and operatic way as it is "mannered" in the narrow intricacies of Donne. Even the inward, overwrought "metaphysical" verse of Donne differs from the "metaphysical" verse of T. S. Eliot, who though he has a good many of the discords and instabilities of the baroque, is nevertheless too diffident, too wistful, too pallid and spare to have more than a similarity of certain poetic devices in common with Donne. Eliot has none of the genuine "metaphysical" abandon—he is too finicking, too tasteful. The impulsiveness of Donne is what so definitely marks him as baroque. In spite of his whimsical incongruities—the evening "spread out against the sky/Like a patient etherised upon a table"—Eliot never commits himself to the deliberate extravagances of Donne, Crashaw, or even the pietistic George Herbert. The Donne-like abandon is more apparent in Ransom or Tate, although they too lack the authentic and shameless "conceit."

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In any event, the "metaphysical" verse must be considered in relation to the whole baroque mannerism.

II

The baroque bears within itself the tensions and oppositions that make it so inaccessible to definition yet so accessible to feeling. Even if each of the arts has its own methods of manipulating its special medium, it is helpful and suggestive in any consideration of the literary baroque to observe what happens in the plastic and visual arts of the period, all the while being mindful that certain parallels cannot be entirely conclusive, and that any comparison between arts has limitations.

Originating in an unbalance of temperament and in the exploitation of technical facility, the baroque in painting, sculpture, and architecture was a reaction against a "grand style." If beauty in the high Renaissance was thought to be, as Alberti said, a "kind of harmony and concord of all the parts" on a monumental scale, the characteristic baroque effect was that of surprise and audacity—the effect so often calculated by the counter-reformation. This freakishness was already evident in Euphuism and the Italianate "conceit" of the Elizabethans. Above all, the baroque is "mannered." Yet it is inexact to speak of any one baroque "manner."

There were at least four "manners," any combination of which was, of course, possible in the individual painter, sculptor, or architect. The degeneration of any of these "manners" into the garish sentimentality of the counter-reformation does not concern us here.

First, there was the "shocking" actualism of painters like Caravaggio, Ribera, or the innumerable "tenebrists." Second, there was a distortion, a tension of the instant that might amount to the bizarre, a "disturbed balance" that ran from the anguish of El Greco's design and color or the more violent chiaroscuro of Rembrandt to the psychological nuances in the smiles of portraits by Frans Hals. This distortion was also manifest in the audacious "illusionism" of the baroque by which whole ceilings were painted away. In this "manner," as in the first, appeared what Wölfflin has well called a bold "grasp of the purely momentary" and a "convergence upon single striking effects." Nowhere is there a more thoroughgoing control of diagonals, of atectonic designs, or of subordination of detail to a single dominant impression, the "unity" of the baroque. Third, there

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was that exuberance of the counter-reformation, the ornamental "manner"—a surrender to the operatic effects of the Carracci, Guido Reni, or, above all, Rubens. Here too were illusion and change and movement, and a purely visual appeal of the surface. This operatic "manner," like the two preceding "manners," might expand into "open" compositions in which the colossal ceased to be monumental and became frankly and sumptuously rhetorical—the difference between Raphael's School of Athens and Rubens' Rape of the Sabines, or Peace and War. In such paintings the recessional composition and unstable equilibrium of the "shocking" realists were swept into large decorative flourishes. If this rhetorical "manner" was at all realistic, it played with the actual, as Wölfflin says, only for the sake of contrast. Lastly, there was a reaction against these three "manners" in the somewhat academic pastoral of the Poussins, or the mellow idyls of Claude Lorrain. This milder, more poised and measured rhetoric, with few emphatic accents, might seem, at first glance, alien to the baroque agitation; but no one could mistake either the Poussins or Claude for other than painters of their age. They were not less "rhetorical" than Rubens, even if they were more stately and restrained. Lyric as it may be, the purely momentary luminescence of Claude, his cultivation of the visual, would link him with the baroque if nothing else did. Yet both Claude and the Poussins stood at the terminus of the legitimate baroque, and showed effects not entirely characteristic of it. The Poussins, especially, belonged in part to the eclectic and academic art of Rome or the France of Louis XIV, which had a sedate Augustan carriage of its own in Le Sueur, Le Brun, and Le Nôtre. Nevertheless it must be realized that the "academic" art, usually contrasted with the baroque, may itself be distinctively baroque when it strives for "elegance" rather than correctness and severity—when, in short, it becomes rhetorical.

With certain modifications, what applies to painting applies likewise to sculpture or architecture by Michaelangelo, Borromini, Bernini, Wren, or Vanbrugh.

III

The passage from baroque to rococo (another matter often misconceived) was an easy and natural one—the passage from Rubens to Watteau, Boucher, or Tiepolo, or from the ornate heroic romances like William Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida* to the nice precisions of

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Pope. The rococo was a gayer, a more suave, baroque in which the heavier accents disappeared amid decorative intricacies. The rococo was an attenuated and brittle baroque. The baroque unity of effect by which everything was subordinated to one or two irresistible effects, relaxed into an engaging and fragile variety of detail. Yet the rococo did not disintegrate into the details that composed it, for (here is a point of consequence in literature—the poetry of Pope, for example) whereas the baroque had exploited every possible incongruity, the rococo painting, architecture, verse, and prose was one of "fitness," "taste," and "true wit." The sense of congruity and consonance was the sense by which the baroque was transformed into the rococo.

In poetry, the transition was evident in the movement from Donne to the Cavaliers, Waller, and Pope. During this progress the contradictory impulses of Donne began to clash more superficially; "wit" became increasingly external, a matter only of verbal distortion and opposition rather than of internal cleavage. As has been said, the impulses began to run parallel, and cleverness became largely an adjustment of language.

Take, for example, the wrenching antitheses of love and death, flesh and spirit, in Donne's *The Relique*:

> *When my grave is broke up againe*
> *Some second ghest to entertaine,*
> *(For graves have learn'd that woman-head*
> *To be to more than one a bed)*
> *And he that digs it, spies*
> *A bracelet of bright haire about the bone,*
> *Will he not let us alone,*
> *And thinke that here a loving couple lies,*
> *Who thought that this device might be some way*
> *To make their soules, at the last busie day,*
> *Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?*

There was an abundance of verbal distortion in Donne, but the oppositions were for the most part deeply internal; the trifling betrayed a complexity of attitudes. Compare with this inward complexity the wit of Waller's *On a Girdle*:

> *It is my Heaven's extreamest spheare,*
> *The pale which held the lovely Deare,*

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My joy, my griefe, my hope, my love,
Doe all within this circle move.

These neat oppositions of sense and phrase, looking backward to the practice of Donne, presently evolved into what George Williamson has called a balanced pattern of neo-classical wit—into the nimble juxtapositions of Pope.

In brief, a poetry of congruity, but very sprightly, evolved from a poetry of deeply clashing impulses. The tensions and psychological paradoxes of the baroque resolved themselves in an expression more external, attenuated, and gracefully "occult."

In its toughness and dramatic attack the poetry of Jonson was as "metaphysical" as that of Donne, just as, in their way, portraits by Van Dyck were as baroque as those by Frans Hals. But there was not the distortion that one finds in Donne. Already Jonson had the sense of coherence and consonance so utterly alien to the Dean of St. Paul's. There was a continuity, however, from this Jonsonian metaphysical verse through Herrick, the Cavaliers, Waller, and the Restoration wits, to Mat Prior and Pope, who retained a great deal of the dramatic metaphysical sting, though not with so irregular or subtle a movement as in Jonson or Suckling. Thus, in a sense, there was no opposition whatever between the distorted and "metaphysical" baroque and the rococo, but rather a reasonably evident progression from Donne to Pope.

IV

So much, of course, largely concerns one of the baroque "manners"—the distorted baroque of complex tensions. As for the "shocking" realism, the sort of thing to be observed in Ribera, Rembrandt's anatomical studies, and certain statuary by Bernini, this revulsion from the "grand manner" of the high Renaissance is best seen in the appalling tragedies by Middleton, Ford, Webster, or Tourneur, or in the satires of Donne and his more physiological exhibitions of his love. Indeed, the "manner" of Donne is not in doubt. He had little of the operatic, the academic, or the pastoral rhetoric, although he had "learned and fantastic elaborations" of conceit, as Grierson calls them. He composed with the tense distortion of El Greco. Caravaggio, notoriously, specialized in the "vulgar." However, like Caravaggio, Donne was rebellious; like Caravaggio, Donne exploited effects, often outrageously. Although more complex and clever, Donne appears,

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at moments, as ill-bred as Caravaggio sometimes was, and as insolent. But Donne was more mercurial and versatile than Caravaggio. He was as competent a master of psychological vocabulary as Frans Hals or Rembrandt. Donne watched intensely his adjustment to the moment. Nothing was stable; the world flickered as he saw it through a sensibility that could not be stabilized for twenty lines. The arbitrary constructions of Rembrandt or El Greco were repeated in the almost impudently irregular course of *The Extasie,* or any of the verses in which he exposed his relation to women. Donne's every observation was wilfully foreshortened by his perplexed egoism. Nowhere in English verse are the momentary and poignant so recklessly manipulated as in Donne, who delighted in the audacities of the naturalistic and "disturbed" baroque.

The hard actualism of Donne's metaphors is particularly significant; and his characteristically baroque intrusion of the material, especially the incongruous, was transmitted throughout the seventeenth century in painting, architecture, and sculpture. Compare the counter-reformation effigies of saints in which not only anatomical detail but even the handling of stuffs contribute their bizarre "effect" with the amazing profusion of freakish imagery in George Herbert and writers of "emblems." Even Herrick retained the sharp details of flowers. The Cavalier and Restoration wits continued to trifle with the flesh in such a way as to mock the very sentiment they professed. And there was the notorious actualism of Cleveland:

> *I like not tears in tune, nor will I prize*
> *His artificial grief that scans his eyes.*
> *Mine weep down pious beads, but why should I*
> *Confine them to the Muses' rosary?*
> *I am no poet here; my pen's the spout,*
> *Where the rain water of my eyes run out.*

This baroque "realism," in fragile and lively form, was gradually modified into the delicate extravagance of the rococo. This engaging rococo detail was already apparent in Lovelace's verses on Elinda's glove:

> *Thou snowy farme with thy five tenements!*
> *Tell thy white mistris here was one*
> *That call'd to pay his dayly rents . . .*

The same "witty" paradox was in Watteau—the hard little Flemish remarks that he would not obliterate from his most idyllic scenes—

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the luster of satins, the glitter of jewels, the smirk of his puppet-like figures who play at sentimentality. *The Rape of the Lock* shows how Pope also kept his eye no less fixedly upon "unpoetic" little facts.

V

As for the operatic and pastoral "manners," they belong in that great seventeenth-century tradition represented by the painting of Rubens and the Poussins, the *Pharonnida* of William Chamberlayne, the heroic play, the Miltonic organ voice, and the sweeping cadences of Dryden. Even if Dryden has of late met approval and the baroque in the fine arts is no longer dismissed out of hand, our admiration of seventeenth-century poetry is held within the confines of our distrust of "rhetoric." We dislike the extravagant and pastoral baroque, both of which are rhetoric.

The most inclusive definition of the baroque is an eccentric or hypertrophied rhetoric. The Renaissance evolved a rhetoric of a monumental kind in Raphael's School of Athens, Titian's Pesaro Madonna, the early designs for St. Peter's, the sculpture of the Medici Chapel, and the King James Version. By an elaboration and emancipation of this rhetoric the operatic baroque achieved its most characteristic effects.

Our position toward the seventeenth century is anomalous. However much we admire the strained effects of Donne, we are averse to "magniloquence" as such; witness Eliot's objection to the "deterioration" of language in Milton. Consequently we are out of the strongest currents of the seventeenth century, wherein the "metaphysical" expression must be viewed against the wider baroque impulses that moved about and through it. We make concessions to the opera or even to the "superb caprices" of Rubens that we hesitate to make to Miltonic language. We feel the tensions and ambiguities of the seventeenth century, but not the accompanying baroque assertiveness and release. This aspect of the baroque is purely kinetic—an abandon, a katharsis, whether it be the exclamatory violence of Donne or the Miltonic grandiloquence and surrender to movement. Repose was to be found only in the broad majesty of Poussin's arcadian landscapes or the measured progress of *Comus* and *Il Penseroso*. But these, too, were rhetoric.

Large issues are involved in an appreciation of this ornate baroque—nothing less, in fact, than one's attitude toward rhetoric.

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After all, the depreciation of rhetoric is a new thing in criticism, not antedating the nineteenth century and the Coleridgean assumption that language is not the "dress of thought," but integral with meaning. Because rhetoric may have been abused, we have a distaste for all rhetoric, a distaste that must limit our understanding of the classics and most writers in the classical tradition.

Possibly a distinction can be made. According to Aristotle, who discussed rhetoric in its original terms of the spoken word (and Milton, like Virgil or Homer, but unlike Donne, is to be read with the tongue rather than with the eye) "if a speaker manages well, there will be something 'foreign' about his speech, while possibly the art may not be detected, and his meaning will be clear. And this is the chief merit of rhetorical language" (*Rhet.*, III, ii, 6-7). Aristotle held among the proper functions of rhetoric the adornment or embellishment of a discourse that is soundly constructed. Aristotle's view is the classic one sanctioned by Quintilian, who assumed that every speech "consists at once of what is expressed and that which expresses, that is to say, of matter and words" (*Inst.* III, v, 1). Indeed, Quintilian held a Jesuitical or counter-reformation view that rhetoric is *eloquentia*: "The ornate is something that goes beyond what is merely lucid and acceptable. It consists in forming a clear conception of what we wish to say, secondly in giving this adequate expression, and thirdly in lending it additional brilliance, a process which may correctly be termed embellishment" (*Inst.* VIII, iii, 61).

This sort of embellishment of structure well managed occurs in a Roman Colosseum or triumphal arch, a St. Peter's, a historical canvas by Rubens, an *Aeneid,* or a *Paradise Lost.* The nineteenth century had a "rhetoric" of its own in both architecture and poetry. Ruskinesque "Gothic" is a "pure" rhetoric, and to that extent false—the embellishment *is* the structure; the structure *is* the embellishment. Note that Ruskin so entirely misconceived Gothic as to presume that a mediaeval cathedral is synonymous with the naturalness, changefulness, redundance, savageness, etc. of its decoration. Here the elaboration and the construction are one—as in the poetry of Shelley. The rhetoric of *Prometheus Unbound* differs from the rhetoric of *Paradise Lost,* as the rhetoric of the Houses of Parliament differs from the rhetoric of Vanbrugh and Wren, who "engage" the orders, as did the builders of the Colosseum or as did Sansovino in designing the Library of St. Mark. Keats is nearer to Milton and Virgil.

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Crashaw is an instance of an entirely baroque rhetoric, antipodal to the "romantic" rhetoric of Shelley. The feeling of both poets is intense; yet in Crashaw the substance can be more readily detached from the eccentric and distorted rhetoric. Crashaw's rhetoric is more "external," possibly because the imagery is *not* a matter of feeling, as it is in Shelley. Crashaw's is the rhetoric of the Gesu Church, of Correggio in painting away the dome of the cathedral at Parma, or of Bernini in designing the baldachin of St. Peter's; it suggests the extravagant handling of drapery in counter-reformation statuary. Both Crashaw and Bernini exemplify the baroque "maniera," "manner," or "style"—that which the seventeenth century conceived as *added to* what is wrought. The *Theophila* by Edward Benlowes is another instance of this "deliberate, conscious perversity of language."

Nor has rhetoric a decorative value alone. The rhetoric of the Renaissance and of the baroque has a high associative value. It is a "formal" embellishment that depends for its effect upon tradition. It is conventional, almost ritualistic; it is allusive, with inherent "cultural" associations, echoes that reverberate from the past and from one's cultivation in the "classics." An extreme instance would be poems composed by reference to seventeenth-century poetical dictionaries. The facade of St. Peter's, the pastoral elegy, allegoric painting or sculpture depend upon such associations. One might remark that T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound employ a rhetoric having such cultural associations. There is, however, no question of rhetoric in Eliot or Pound: both are highly allusive, but neither fulfils the essential condition of rhetoric that it "embellish." Indeed, Pound approves of the statement by Rémy de Gourmont that "*Le style, c'est de sentir, de voir, de penser, et rien plus.*" However "foreign" the allusion in Eliot or Pound may strike us as being, there is no Miltonic "elevation"; that is what Eliot dreads—the interruption between the surface and the core. His own practice is even averse to the calculated extravagance that marks the wit of Crashaw or Donne.

In the sense that rhetoric is traditional, it can serve as a norm. One measures a facade by Sansovino against the Colosseum, Tasso against the *Aeneid,* the *Aeneid* against the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* The baroque was essentially a revulsion against the norm; it directed its rhetoric toward certain abnormal or atectonic effects, as did Bernini or Rubens or Milton. *Lycidas* is filled with a strange, almost shock-

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ingly personal distortion of rhetoric, recalling Michaelangelo's sculpture:

> *Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,*
> *And slits the thin spun life. But not the praise,*
> Phœbus *repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;*
> *Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil*
> *Nor in the glistering foil*
> *Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumour lies . . .*

The rhetoric of the eighteenth century, when it failed of the rococo taste and refinement, was not ordinarily successful. Hence the Wordsworthian reversion to a language of common life.

VI

The fact remains, however, that critics who have identified form with substance (particularly those who have followed I. A. Richards) may have denied an entirely legitimate employment of rhetoric. In so doing they undermine a proper evaluation of Virgil or Milton or, for that matter, the exquisite rhetoric of Pope. No one would deny the claims of poetry in which the language is functional, in which there is no interruption between the surface and the core. Yet is there not a "romantic" and "semantic" fallacy in the view that in estimable poetry substance and language are one? Is not the rhetoric of Shelley as false as that of Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty* is *not* false?

By report, a New Zealand prisoner of war lately wrote to the Red Cross explaining that because he is eager to become a poet, he wishes to be sent books upon metres of English verse and the mythology of ancient Greece. Possibly he is not in error. In a sense poetry is a ritual. One of its rituals—its liturgy, in the phrase of C. S. Lewis —is its rhetoric (in the sense of its embellishment). Arnold said that the protestantism of the protestant religion, its nakedness, is the result of individualism. This same individualism in poetry expressed itself only imperfectly in the so-called "romantic" poets, who to a large degree continued to practice a poetic liturgy or ritual sanctioned by tradition. Wordsworth at one time determined to compose in the plain language of men, to strip his poetic performance of the ritual of gaudyverse. But in some of his most successful passages he continued the rhetorical gestures that had always patently set poetry apart from common speech. Keats and Byron, and often Shelley,

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performed the same ritual. Thus the "romantics" practiced an inhibited and partial protestantism in poetry.

Not until Whitman was the individualist-protestant-poet really emancipated from the iconography of rhetoric; not until his barbaric yawp did the language of poetry become "functional" and entirely "individual."

Nor has it indicated any return to poetic ritual. T. S. Eliot has intimated that in religion the spirit killeth and the letter giveth life; thus he rejects the extremes of liberal protestantism. Critically and poetically he is, however, a liberal protestant, in spite of the fact that his verses are weighted with references to tradition—"classical" is his word. Poetically, a parallel to ritual is rhetoric. There is no reason, of course, why an Anglo-Catholic in religion and a royalist in politics should be a ritualist in poetry. Nevertheless Eliot's evident attempt to stand upon something like consistency (because of his repudiation of liberalism) ought to lead to something like ritual in poetic method. But he disapproves of this ritual because it leads to what he calls the interruption between the surface and the core of such poets as Milton. An orthodox classicism will not object to this interruption, but instead will assume that "substance" is distinguishable from "form." The abiding classical conception is that of art as *téchne,* a craft in dealing with what is said. Dr. Johnson's belief that language is a "dress of thought," Dryden's definition of true wit as a propriety of words and thoughts, Quintilian's elaborate recipes for oratorical effect, and Aristotle's observation that the language of tragedy is "embellished"—these are a legitimately classical or ritualist view of poetry. The opposing view, that language is integral with meaning, is anti-classical and expressionist. Dr. Johnston's *Vanity of Human Wishes* is a monumentally classical and rhetorical achievement, confined within the limits of an iconography. Thus Eliot's profession of classicism is troubling, in view of his remarks upon Milton. His proper trinity might have been royalism in politics, Anglo-Catholicism in religion, and "rhetoric"—a kind of liturgy—in poetry. A ritualist in religion and politics should be the last to complain of the Miltonic ritual in poetry or to observe that Milton's language is "artificial" and "conventional." The protestantism of the protestant tradition in literary criticism does not seem to have been attained until I. A. Richards' contention that "form" in poetry cannot be considered apart from its "substance," that the "way" and the "whither" cannot be distinguished. Eliot's

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attitude toward Milton would seem to commit him to this very "naked" protestantism.

One might venture the surmise that sooner or later any reversion to ritual in religion or politics will involve a toleration of the ritual of verse, which in its largest sense is rhetoric—the sort of rhetoric to be found in its most ritualistic form in Homer, Virgil, Dante, *Beowulf,* or Milton. It is the rhetoric of Aristotle, Quintilian—and the Jesuits. Any such toleration will mark the retreat from individualism in poetry and the criticism of poetry. It will also mark, certainly, a reversion from what Richards has aptly called the modern "dissolution of consciousness," the psychological individualism that evoked, first, the private language of modern poetry, then the criticism of Richards himself. A more sympathetic evaluation of Milton may be the first token of a reaction in poetry that has already occurred on one level in Anglo-Catholicism and on another level in Eliot's "royalism."

VII

For us, at the moment, the issue lies beween Donne and Milton. And it is Donne who is, after all, an eccentric figure. Milton stands more nearly at the center of the seventeenth century. He exhibits almost every baroque "manner"; perhaps *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regained,* alone, are not "mannered" (they suggest, instead, a grave academism). To be sure Milton does not represent the explosive baroque; he often bears himself, as in *Comus,* with the Augustan restraint of the Poussins. We may say, nevertheless, that the decorative and even gorgeous "movement" of Miltonic prose, of *Lycidas,* of *Paradise Lost* represents an Anglican art of the counter-reformation:

> *Th'imperial ensign, which full high advanc't*
> *Shon like a meteor streaming to the wind*
> *With gems and golden lustre rich imblaz'd,*
> *Seraphic arms and trophies: all the while*
> *Sonorous mettal blowing martial sounds:*
> *At which the universal host upsent*
> *A shout that tore Hell's concave, and beyond*
> *Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.*
> *All in a moment through the gloom were seen*
> *Ten thousand banners rise into the air*
> *With orient colours waving: with them rose*

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A forrest huge of spears: and thronging helms
Appear'd, and serried shields in thick array
Of depth immeasurable . . .

This scene has all the baroque "great imagined space" in which figures move freely. In the verse-paragraph there is the same handling of masses as in the colossal drama of St. Peter's, or the full-blooded performance of Rubens in the Medici series. The Miltonic Eden with its slope hills, cool recesses, and vernal groves in which dance the Graces and Hours is a pastoral more monumental than the Poussins ever painted. In the milder, more gently modulated tones of Claude's rhetoric are *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro,* with their lyric shimmer and evanescence of russet lawns, fallow gray, and glooming battlements. Never was T. S. Eliot more perverse than in observing that Milton fails in visual imagination and that his poetry is not "serious." Then too there is the Miltonic realism, the distinctively baroque juxtaposition of the actual with the elaborate, the august, the idyllic, the idealized. This sort of play with realistic detail—the cock strutting to the barn door in *L'Allegro*—shows how the baroque assimilated the genre. The homely passages so consummately handled in the *paysage* by Ruysdael or Hobbema reappear in Milton's cottage chimney smoking between aged oaks. One suspects that critics have been amiss regarding the scene in which Eve, the hausfrau, prepares for Adam and Raphael the dinner that will not cool. We may not like the culinary apparatus; it seems incongruous, coming as it does in conjunction with the large dignity of Adam our primitive great sire. Traditionally "epic" as such apparatus may be, here is also a characteristically baroque effect—the intrusion of everyday matters along with elevated passages. To our eye, a distracting naturalism appears everywhere in the baroque: in the muscularity of certain statuary by Michaelangelo, in the curious little dogs that bound about the corners of Rubens' most elaborate spectacles, in the violent accent upon nonessentials in the painting of Rembrandt, in the rustication of stones in facades designed by Vanbrugh. These culinary matters were no less "low" for Milton than for us. That is the point. They *are* "low."

So far it has seemed that Milton is "externally" baroque, that his baroque quality depends largely upon elaboration and rhetoric. But he is baroque in an inward sense as well. As Wölfflin says, the baroque, in spite of its exploitation of the surface, has a certain inconclusiveness, an unwillingness to say everything clearly. Undoubtedly

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certain baroque obscurity is due simply to violence of expression, as in Donne, or to the extreme condensation and dislocation of imagery, due to eccentric or wilful associations. Thus the baroque "distortion" produces its own "suggestion" which is in part a result of "strangeness." This condensation, this suggestion are likewise in some of the greatest passages of Milton, as arresting as they are inconclusive. Surely one of the fascinations of *Lycidas* is its obliqueness:

> *Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,*
> *His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,*
> *Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge,*
> *Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.*
> *Ah; who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?*
> *Last came and last did go,*
> *The pilot of the Galilean lake,*
> *Two massy keyes he bore of metals twain*
> *(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain) . . .*

An almost cabalistic obscurity intensifies the Miltonic passages on God. Like Rembrandt, like Michaelangelo, Milton is inscrutable with an inscrutability more profound than Donne's, tantalizing as Donne's may be.

With the coming of Dryden and the heroic play, this inscrutability is wiped away. Although Dryden preserves the assertive, manly rhythm of the baroque, its realism, attack, and almost metaphysical accent, he is not so complex as Milton. We admire Dryden because he is forthright, not as Donne or Milton are forthright—in expressing perplexity—but rather as vigorously dealing with matters that have been, for the moment, simplified. Dryden wavers, shifting as he does between one resolution and another; but at every instant, he seems clear enough. The inscrutability of both Donne and Milton is apt to result from a painful perplexity at the moment of composition; hence a deep baroque "distortion" and complexity. The rhetoric of the heroic play is refreshing and kathartic. But the heroic play does not have the inward agitation of the profounder baroque—the baroque of Michaelangelo, of *The Duchess of Malfi* or *The Changeling,* of Donne's *Divine Poems,* or of *Lycidas*. Donne, then, stands in genuine relationship with Milton. Both must be seen against the authentic "movement" of the seventeenth century. When thus seen, Milton is the greatest of the baroque poets, the most polyphonic.

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In Memory of Henri Bergson

Paul Valéry

EDITOR'S NOTE.—*The following is the translation of an address delivered before the French Academy shortly after Bergson's death on January 4, 1941. There are undoubtedly political intentions in Valéry's celebration of his Jewish colleague as the representative and regenerator of the French tradition, as well as in his contraposing of Bergson and Kant, and in his statement that Bergson was the last great name in the history of the European intelligence. This was said at a time when the Nazi propagandists and their Vichyite collaborators were hailing the advent of a new European Renaissance. Valéry, however, does not hesitate to paint the "new age" in the darkest colors.*

AT the beginning of this year which finds France at the bottom, its life subjected to the most difficult ordeals and its future almost beyond the reach of the imagination, I felt that I ought to express to this Society our common hope that the times to come may be less bitter, less sinister, and less dreadful than those through which we have been living since 1940.

But in the very first days of this new year the Academy received, so to speak, a blow on the head. Last Saturday, January 4th, Henri Bergson died at the age of 81, succumbing, apparently without pain, to a congestion of the lungs. On Monday his body was taken from his home to the cemetery at Garches. The funeral was necessarily extremely simple, and all the more affecting on that account. No ceremony, no speeches—but so much the more silent reflection and feeling of exceptional piety among all those present. About thirty people were gathered in the parlor around the coffin. The French government was represented by Ambassador de Brinon, the Minister of Public Education by M. Lavelle. I conveyed to Madame Bergson the condolences of the Academy, and she asked me to thank you in her behalf. Very soon they came for the coffin, and on the threshold

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of the house we bade our last farewell to the greatest philosopher of our time.

He was the pride of our society. Whether or not we were attracted to his philosophy, whether or not we followed him in the profound quest to which he devoted his life, and in the truly creative evolution of his thought—constantly maturing in boldness and freedom—we possessed in him a most authentic model of the highest intellectual virtues. His name, universally recognized, carried a sort of moral authority in things of the mind. France was able to appeal to that name and to that authority under circumstances which I am sure all of you well remember. He had many disciples, who followed him with a fervor and almost a devotion which no one else in the world of ideas has so far been able to arouse.

I do not intend to discuss his philosophy—this is not the time for it. Any such estimate ought to be very profound, and it could only be so if made in the light of clear days and in the fullness of intellectual activity. The very old, and consequently very difficult, problems with which M. Bergson dealt, like those of time, of memory and, chiefly of living development, were given new life by him—thus curiously altering the situation in which philosophy found itself some fifty years ago. At that time the powerful Kantian criticism, armed with a formidable apparatus for the verification of knowledge and with a very skillfully articulated abstract terminology, dominated education and had even imposed itself upon politics, to the extent that politics can have any contact with philosophy. M. Bergson was neither won over nor intimidated by the harshness of this doctrine, which laid down so imperatively the limits of thought. He undertook to raise metaphysics from the kind of discredit and neglect in which he found it. You know what reverberations were caused by certain lectures he gave at the College of France and what renown his hypotheses and analyses achieved throughout the whole world. While the philosophers of the eighteenth century had been, in the main, under the influence of physical-mechanical conceptions, our illustrious colleague fortunately allowed himself to be attracted by the sciences of life. He found his inspiration in biology. He thought of life, and understood it and conceived it as the bearer of spirit. He was not afraid to pursue, during the observation of his own consciousness, certain insights into problems that will never be solved. He had performed, however, the essential task of restoring and vidicating the taste for a

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type of thinking that is nearer to our essence than any purely logical development of concepts can be—especially since it is generally impossible to give these concepts definitions that are not controversial.

The true value of philosophy is simply to lead thought back to itself. This activity demands from him who would describe it, and who would communicate what is revealed to him of his inner life, a special application and even the invention of a manner of expression suited to his purpose, for language exhausts itself at its own source. At this point the full capacity of M. Bergson's genius showed itself. He dared to borrow from poetry its magical weapons and he combined that power of poetry with that precision from which no mind fed on the exact sciences can ever allow itself to deviate. He made use of the most apt and novel metaphors and images to recreate in the minds of others the discoveries which he had made in his own and the results of his inner experiences. Out of this came a style that did not need to be pedantic in order to become philosophical. This confused and even shocked some people. But many were happy to recognize in the flexibility and gracious richness of his language certain peculiarly French graces and shadings which the previous generation had regarded as something against which serious thinking ought to be on guard. May I remark that this renewal was practically contemporaneous with that produced in music by the appearance of the subtle and very graceful work of Claude Achille Debussy. Both were characteristic French reactions.

Nor was this all. Henri Bergson, great philosopher and great writer, was also, as he should have been, a great friend of men. Perhaps his mistake lay in believing that men were worthy of friendship. He worked with all his heart for the union of minds and ideas, believing that these stand above political organisms and forces.—Though is it not, perhaps, just the opposite that is bound to take place? Perhaps we must regard as typically human the very varied antagonisms that divide men—and prominent among these antagonisms is that which brings the partisans and servants of this idea of unity into conflict with those who do not accept it and who regard it as a dangerous delusion.

No doubt M. Bergson believed that the very fate of the spirit is inseparable from the feeling of its presence and of its universal value; in this, as well as in other ways, he was at one with religious thought. The meaning of life, even in its simplest and humblest manifesta-

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tions, seemed to him essentially spiritual. We can imagine therefore what must have been the state of that vast and deep mind in the presence of events that destroyed so many beautiful forecasts and so swiftly and so violently changed the face of things. Was he able to retain his faith in the evolution of our species towards an ever higher level? I do not know. For unaware that he had been in Paris since September and not learning of his presence here until the moment when I was told of his death, I had not been to visit him. But I do not doubt that he was cruelly stricken to the very depths of his being by that total disaster the consequences of which we are now experiencing.

An extremely elevated, pure and superior type of thinking man, perhaps one of the last to have thought exclusively, deeply and superlatively! In a period when the world thinks and meditates less and less; when civilization seems to reduce itself from day to day to nothing more than the memories and traces we preserve of its many-sided richness and its free and exuberant intellectual production; while miseries, anxieties and constraints of every kind suppress and discourage the undertakings of the mind—in such a period Bergson seems already to belong to a bygone age, and his name to be the last great name in the history of the European intelligence.

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The Hand That Fed Me

Isaac Rosenfeld

Dec. 21

Dear Ellen,

It was very sweet of you to send me a Christmas card. It was really a wonderful gesture, and so simple! When you prepared your Christmas list you included me—and that's all there was to it.

You know, in that one day of ours I never did manage to find out who your friends were (not that I wasn't eager to!). But I imagine your list went something like this: aunts, uncles, cousins; girl friends; boy friends. It amuses me to think that I must have been included in the latter group, in the company, let us say, of John, Bob, Steve, Chick, etc. I am quite willing to share the honor with them, even though the names of my colleagues must be entirely imaginary and even though you probably put my own name last on the list. But perhaps you had me in mind all along, knowing what a gesture that would be! Naturally, you must have assumed I'm not in the army. I'm not quarreling with you, but there's something a little glib in that assumption. Why, so far as you are concerned, should I *not* be in the army? Do you follow me? Is it simply a habit of thinking so that whenever—rarely!—you do come to me, you immediately say, "Joe? Oh, he's still around." I can see no other way, unless, God save my mind, you've taken to obtaining information from my friends, whom you have sworn to secrecy. But how should you know who my friends are, since I never found out yours?

Of course, I may have mentioned Otto to you—he was very much on my mind that day. Would you believe it, while we were walking down Hoyne Avenue and I was, permit me, impressing you with all I had, I kept wondering what Otto would do in similar circumstances, and I was gloating, sure that he would never have been able to give such a fine account of himself! Furthermore, I still

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gloat over it although—for all the fine impression I made—you never answered my letters and even once, when I called on you (for perhaps the tenth time) you actually hid from me. I know all about it. Your brother came to the door and he seemed to have half a mind to admit me; but behind him I could hear a commotion of shushing and whispering, and I'm sure it was you, ducking into the pantry and telling them to say you were out and on no account to let me in.

Of course, what makes all this slightly ridiculous, is the fact that it happened three years ago. But why did you wait three years before sending me a card? What was wrong with the Christmas of the very same year, or the one of the year following? Ah, I know how your mind works. On Christmas, 1939, you *suppressed* all thought of me. In 1940 you allowed yourself to think, but only to the following extent: "If I send him a Christmas card now, he'll think I've been unable to forget him. So we'll wait another year or two. By that time it'll be quite clear, when he gets my card, not that I've been *unable* to forget him, but that I have so good a memory that I can even recall the name and address of a man whom I saw only once, three years ago." Am I right?

But it's a trivial thing and why attach so much importance to it? I suppose you would have me believe that. You would have me believe that your card was only a way of acknowledging a pleasant day that you had hitherto failed to acknowledge. Something brought it to your mind—say, an onion you had eaten recently. And so the card, yes?

Not on your life, Ellen, not for one moment will I believe it. For if it were only a trivial matter, would you have waited three years? You would have sent me a card at once, or even phoned me on the following day, as you'd promised. Trivialities are the things women rush into, feeling they're important. The important things, however, are what they mull over, plot, deliberate, all to no end. It took you three years, Ellen, to convince yourself that a single afternoon you had spent with me was trivial!

So there you are.

But one more thing. On your card you have written, "From Ellen. Do you remember me?" A pretty little disingenuous note! I assure you, your card was sent in the deepest conviction that I had not once ceased to think of you. I'm sure of it. If you thought I'd forgotten you, you wouldn't have dared send a card. What, a man

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should receive a card from a certain Ellen and wonder who she is? Any time you'd leave yourself open! Or, on the other hand, was it a rather coy way of insinuating that you'd all but forgotten me? You see, if you are willing to admit that I may have forgotten you, isn't that another way of suggesting that you barely, barely manage to remember me?

Nonsense! I know perfectly well that you've never forgotten me.—But who are you, Shakespeare, that the smallest scrap of your writing should be covered with commentaries? Enough of that.

Do you remember me?
Indeed!

Joseph Feigenbaum

Dec. 22

Dear Ellen,

It just occurred to me that while I wrote you at some length, yesterday, I forgot the obvious subject of our correspondence—Xmas. So I'm writing you again to wish you a merry Xmas.

Yours,
J. F.

P.S. Of course, I could just as well send a Xmas card.

Dec. 23

Dear Ellen,

Since I wrote to you twice, I might just as well have said something worth saying. After all, even if we have "forgotten" each other, we still have our three years to look back on—years, may I add, all the more interesting because we did not, in any way, spend them together.

Please understand my motive. If it seems sentimental to you, then you're a fool, and I've no fear of offending you when I say so. And besides what can you do about it? Can you threaten to break off our friendship? Can you threaten to stop writing? As if you would ever write! You see, Ellen, by avoiding me you've put yourself completely in my power. But that's hardly worth pointing out.

Our whole meeting comes back to me. I remember that summer, no work, no friends, no conversation, the realization I was meant

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for WPA. What a wonderful summer of self-discovery! Believe me, chaos is the mother of knowledge. It's a distinguished family: indolence, poverty, frustration, *seediness*—these are the blood relations of that little monster, Mr. Knowthyself. I shall never again be afraid of turning myself inside out, like an empty pocket—what treasures of lint and fuzz! Do you follow me, Ellen? I mean to say, it is sometimes a good thing to shake yourself out, and go around unhappy—you lose most of your delusions. A happy man takes a great risk—of believing that he is what he seems to be.

Well, I was forced to go on WPA; forced outwardly, that is, for inwardly I went as a free man. I knew what to expect. My friends ("my generation" as it became fashionable to call them) were all on one cultural project or another. I would go on the Writers' Project and fill out a time sheet as well as any one else. All such matters, which are done with only half a will, are called ways of keeping body and soul together; actually, they are ways of keeping them apart. That is, you do what you do, and you don't have to worry about undergoing any changes. WPA was a great social invention, it was refrigeration on a mass scale. It took us as we were, and froze us as we were; it preserved us, it kept us from decaying. But what's all this? I merely wanted to say a few things it was impossible to say when we walked out of the relief station together, and I find that I am overdramatizing myself.

I hadn't thought there would be such a long line at the C.R.A. office, so many Negroes, Poles, old men. Not a single applicant for the Writers' Project among them. It is so much better to be an unemployed writer than an unemployed anything-else that I felt especially sorry for them. An unemployed plumber, for example—a man who is starving because there are no toilet bowls for him to fix. There is something so pathetic in that! A writer, at least, is always writing. Whatever happens, he records it. It begins to rain—he says to himself: it is raining. He walks down the stairs—he says to himself: I am walking down the stairs. He is always writing in his head, and it does him good. But what good does it do a man to go around fixing toilet bowls in his head? Pig misery! So there I was, looking at the men around me and recording them, putting down their coughs, their leanness, the dirt, the stubble on their faces, and meanwhile thinking: here am I, a writer, this is me, etc., etc.

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Ellen, you look at yourself only in mirrors. Relying on a piece of glass the way you do, you probably have little notion of the actual figure you cut. That day, when you were not smearing on lipstick while looking into a compact-mirror, you were sucking the point of a pencil, and rolling it between your lips. That you, who refuse to write to me, should have come into my life at the point of a pencil!

Now I might almost begin to flatter you—to dwell on the image of a girl, a little above average in height, more than ordinary in appearance, a girl, though I suspect the word, quite beautiful, standing there in the basement among all the coughing old men, surrounded by steampipes, benches, notices plastered on the wooden walls: *Bekanntmachung, Avviso*. And all the while this girl rolls the point of a pencil in her mouth. Do you know, after you had caught my eye, you stuck your tongue out at me. First the pencil, and then the tongue. Ellen, Ellen!

It would have meant very little. It would only have been a study in violent contrast, squalor and flirtation, sex and the relief office—and, as a matter of fact, I was not sure at the beginning that it meant anything more. But immediately the element of personal worth entered. Almost at once I talked to you, you will recall, as though you were more than a pretty girl with a pencil stuck in your mouth. It was you who did the flirting, made the advances. Do I wear make-up? Do I carry a purse full of compacts, powderboxes, lipsticks? Understand, I accuse you of nothing. I am glad you behaved as you did. Perhaps because I am not thin and old and coughing, you saw to it that I should notice you. But it was I who saw to all the rest.

I want you to observe that you were ahead of me in the line. When your preliminary interview was over and your preliminary papers were filled out, you could have gone home. I expected you, at any moment, while you were idling around the basement, I expected you to break away, perhaps with a slight nod in my direction, and go home. But I knew you would not. I said nothing, you will remember, I even pretended not to notice you. But how carefully I watched you, and how pleased I was! There you were, waiting for me, and it was all voluntary on your part, and even somewhat embarrassing. The pretexts you invented! First you sat down on one of the benches and stretched and yawned as though you were tired. Then you removed your shoes and rubbed your feet—such pretty feet, if I may say, and just barely dirty! By that time I thought I might dare

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acknowledge that I knew you were waiting for me. I smiled. I motioned to you. But you would not admit it. You wouldn't look at me. You curled up on the bench where you sat and pretended to go to sleep—a wonder no one saw you and put you out. I knew you were waiting for me, that you had already acknowledged me even more deeply than I had acknowledged you—since at the outset I was only responding to a flirtation, but what were you responding to? I don't flirt. You were therefore responding to me! It made me so happy, somewhat dizzy, it was even slightly alarming. I sang a song, I joked with the man who stood ahead of me in line, a short and chubby Negro whom I liked immensely. I offered him cigarettes. When he took only one, I slipped some more into his hip pocket, so carefully, I might have been stealing his wallet. He was now my friend. Having become your friend, I was everybody's friend. I even smiled at the relief worker who interviewed me, a bitter hag who resented my happiness and detained me with unnecessary questions, as though to extract my secret. And when I was through with her and came out, startled to find you absent from the bench, only to see you standing at the door, so clearly, so obviously waiting!

That whole afternoon, Ellen, the walk to your house, your friendliness, your kindness in asking me up and inviting me to have lunch with you! Even now I can hardly believe that I should ever have received such gifts of kindness. Such absolute friendship, comradeship, trust, good will, and with it all the constant promise of intimacy: one moment you are at my shoulder, the next, you take my arm, or my hand, or you pretend a mosquito has landed and you slap my cheek. And what a lunch! Rye bread and borscht, served by your father, and with such good nature, even after he had learned my name and drawn certain unavoidable inferences. Borscht, furthermore, with bits of green onion floating in it. I was so happy to learn you were Russian! I consider myself a Russian, you understand. As a Jew, I am also a German, an Italian, a Frenchman, a Pole, I am all Europe—but a Russian, foremost.

I am sure that all this did not come to naught because I am a Jew. To begin with, you are the kind of gentile who knows how to say "goy"—a word I distinctly heard you use. There is only one nation on the earth—the nation of those who call the rest of the world "goyim." We Jews use it in contempt, because of our fears, but it is capable of elevation into a word of pride and brotherhood. No,

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that is not the reason why we "broke up." There are only two possibilities, one very flattering to me, the other, degrading.

To take the base one first, I observed, when I entered your house and when I was eating lunch, that you avoided all reference to WPA. Your presented me to your father, and later to your brother, as an old friend from school whom you bumped into downtown while looking for a job. You would not admit that you had applied for WPA, and you would not have them know that I, too, had done so. What a false and wicked pride, and—since you evidently know something about such matters—what utter disloyalty to your class! Your father, a carpenter as I recall, was obviously unemployed. He had that look about him. And your brother, who was building a model airplane in the middle of the day, evidently had nothing better to do. So what was there to be ashamed of? And what if your mother, as I gather from her absence, was the only one working in the family? What of it? Must you be ashamed? But perhaps you were even more ashamed of me than of yourself. Perhaps the very fact that you met me in a relief station was enough to queer me. Then why flirt with me and bring me to your home?

But apart from all that, what a fool you were not to go through with your WPA application. I scoured all the rolls, inquired at all the projects where you might conceivably have been taken on, but no one had heard of you. Ah, what you missed! Myself, I went on to the Writers' Project and compiled a 100,000 word report on pigeon racing in Chicago, including a life-size biography of Josiah Breen, the pigeon fancier. And what did you do? Pickle works, belt-buckle factory, typist, stenographer, secretary? You are a traitor to your class, Ellen, to your better instincts and your better capacities, and you allowed what we call "the most crucial experience of our generation" to slip by you. But this is a digression.

As I say, you may have been ashamed to know me, or to continue seeing me because I was going on WPA. Or perhaps, even because I had caught you in the act, applying for the national dispensation. This, of course, is only a possibility; and I may be wrong. Assuming that I am, and that you had your own and better reasons, there remains another possibility, which I am very eager to entertain. It does me good.

This is mystery. It involves a whole world, of which you are the hub. At the center, beside you, let me place a young man, of respect-

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able, and somewhat better family than your own, a man whom we shall call Willard. Am I warm? When we met, you had already known Willard for a period of two years. He, a serious fellow, perhaps a student of law, or already a lawyer, could not help but have serious intentions. He doesn't laugh very often, your Willard; and when you do, opening your mouth wide, it disconcerts him. Furthermore, when you suck pencils in his presence, or show him your tongue, he is more than a little embarrassed. But what can you do about it? You were to marry him. You were then, I should judge, twenty-four, the age when one begins observing that a woman is not growing any younger. Besides, you are *used* to him, miserable habit. He is good to you, he's solid, he looks down on WPA, he smokes cigars. What then? How else are you to act when this wistful, melancholy, timid, cynical and so appealing young writer comes along and speaks to you as a man has never spoken before, and dwells on you, and intimates, and sighs and stares? It is, after all, shocking to discover that one's fiance is not the ultimate man on earth, and that another, a man you met in a basement, who has never kissed you or walked you through the park, is capable of preempting the emotions you have already consigned and wrapped and, furthermore, of providing you with new ones. *Nyet, krasavitsa moya?*

Ellen, if this be true, then your reticence is a tribute! Thank you for ignoring me, thank you for your silence. For it means you realized, in those few hours, that going with me would make irrecoverable your whole past life and its commitments. After all, women have been known to keep several men on a string. Thank you for not binding me. For it means you feared the string, and where it might lead you. And what if the string should break? The fear that a string might break is the fear of love!

But look at all these pages I have written, and where will I find an envelope large enough? Ellen, unintentionally, merely out of a desire to say a few things I had not said before, I have invoked more of the past than I had intended. It has brought me back to that helpless, pitiful state of mind—I despise it—where a man lives on promises. I have drugged myself into believing what I believed three years ago—your promise to call me, to write to me, to see me again. Now I know you will write, if only a few words, and I know you will answer me at once.

Always yours,

Joe

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Dec. 29

Dear Ellen,

Christmas passed, and nearly six days have gone by. I tell myself that you have been very busy over the holidays, that you haven't found time to write. But I knew full well that if you were going to write, you would already have done so. Why do you deny me this? Is it my pride or your presumption? Have I touched too sensitive, too deep a point? Or could it be that I have merely bored you?

I tell myself I have bored her. But how can that be when I still believe in the love she seemed to have offered me? Is it possible? If the world were made up of such haphazard, ill fitting emotions, no pattern at all would exist—it just wouldn't hang together.

Excuse me if I have used the word love in vain. But the more I have thought of you, the more I have grown to believe that I have a right to use it. It is almost as though I have written these letters to make myself believe that you love me. God knows what I have written! God knows why I go on!

I suppose every man sometimes has the urge to pour himself out, release all the stops and let go. My sense of caution should tell me that few men have the right to confess; only murderers and hardened criminals, never men who are merely unhappy. Those who have really committed crimes, those who have an actual guilt lying over them—they have something to say. But the rest of us—perhaps we become liars when we open our mouths, liars or pathetic wishers, and half of what we say may be false, and the other half merely the result of a vain striving for a sense of personal history.

Then why do I go on? Why do I persist in writing to you in the face of what must surely amount to a personal humiliation? I'll tell you why—and may the telling damn you! A man feels humiliated only when he is cast down from one position to a lower one. Some men never learn their lesson. No sooner humiliated, they attempt to injure someone else in return. These are the unpleasant characters, the personalities charged with an explosive that any touch may set off. Your Willard may be of such a type—not because he is mean; he may even be sweet in his own way—but only insofar as he lacks subtlety. But our other type of man is a different sort entirely. When he is humiliated he does not bound back with a rage that destroys his perception. Instead, he learns. He sees most clearly what concerns him most closely; and he accepts it and makes it a part of himself. When

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he has been utterly humiliated, he observes that he has touched bottom; having reached bottom, he knows there's no lower he can fall. There's a comfort, a perpetual cushion in certain kinds of misery—you rest on it, just as a contented man rests at the top of his career. Top or bottom, either way—but no struggling in the middle!

Does this succeed in explaining myself to you? Most likely not. I feel you must learn something about the way in which I live, in order to understand why, after three years have passed, I shower you with letters, to which I expect no answer.

I live in what I consider to be a state of exile. Among the friends I have at present is a certain Zampechini, an Italian refugee, and a certain Lutzek, a German refugee. I have told them, "Boys, we are in exile together. Not from our separate countries,—but from history." But why proceed in this fashion, at this level, away over your head? It is enough to state briefly the following conditions:

1. I am alone.
4. The last six women I approached unconditionally turned me down.
2. There is a war on and I am out of it on all fronts; neither losing nor profiting by it, and not even employed.
3. I live in a rooming house, on the allowance my father very grudgingly gives me.
5. Ever since WPA folded up,

but never mind the rest.

I was going to tell you more. I wanted, first, to tell you everything; then, a little; now, nothing. Ah, what's the difference? I cannot bear to tell you what I have suffered, because I am proud of it, and it would only bore you. Enough. Let this be a last effort at explanation in a letter full of abortive efforts. As a man who, quite confidently, has touched bottom, both in what he has suffered and in personal esteem, I feel nothing I do can injure me. Your rebuffs are *not, definitely not* a further humiliation. I understand myself too well. I am of the brotherhood of paupers who endure everything at their own expense. And so, if I go out of my way and out of my time to reach after a promised happiness of three years back, this, too, a deliberate delusion, is also at my own expense. And perhaps even the

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greatest irony is my knowing that while you refuse to answer my letters, you also fail to understand them.

But, no fear. I shall plague you no longer.

Feigenbaum

Dec. 31

Dear Ellen,

Contrary to the word I had given, I called on you yesterday. I am writing today to identify myself, to make it perfectly clear that it was I, and no one else, who called.

He said you were out. Who, I do not know. Perhaps it was "your Willard." I believed him, made no further inquiries. I left no message and no name. In a fit of humiliation I withheld my name. I am writing today to repudiate that humiliation. It was not of the bottom variety; it was of the rising sort that struggles midway between its origins and its hopes. It was not true to nature. My humiliation admits no hopes.

Now that there can be no doubt in your mind as to the identity of your caller, I may go on to the next point. By calling on you I satisfied a partial longing. Naturally, complete satisfaction would have come only with my seeing you. But as it is I saw your house, the door which opened, the stairs that led up, the door that closed in my face. Willard does not count. I am indifferent to him. My point is that with yesterday's closing of the door I accepted as closed our whole relationship. I shall no longer plague you with letters, no longer make any attempt to see you. And this is the truth. You may rely on it, not because I have promised you—my promises are evidently as little to be trusted as yours. But it is so because I have at last accepted it, and have willed it to be so. I find that this decision, against which I have been fighting ever since your Xmas card came, has, surprisingly, liberated me.

For what I have to say actually has nothing to do with humiliation. Very simply, Ellen, I love you. It is so easy to say, and one can say it as well as another. Why did I have to torture myself?

I love you. And why do I love you? Because you came to me. Because, in the basement of the relief station you noticed me before I noticed you, and because your flirting was not in response to an act of mine, but an overture, an opening entirely of your own. For

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this, all my gratitude. Because, at a moment when you did not yet exist for me, I already existed for you. Isn't this reason enough?

No, it needs further explaining. I feel that the more I love you, the less you understand me. You must know that a man like myself, so deeply displeased, dissatisfied with himself as I am, can only be saved by an act of graciousness. A blessing, external and gratuitous must come to him. For he will destroy whatever is internal, whatever comes out of himself. The lower he falls, the more he will demand and the louder he will clamor for salvation. An absolute beggar demands the entire world.

This is why I love you. But if I love you because you flirted with me, I am, at the same time, inclined to disapprove your flirtatiousness. I could understand flirtatiousness in a nun. But in a woman like yourself, Ellen! A nun, let us assume, is repressed. But you! Not repression but bonheur, bliss at every pore. Now that I no longer need withhold anything, now that I am free, I may tell you what I felt when I first saw you. Believe me, and here enters another irony, my first sight of you was intuitive proof that I would have you! That is what is called spontaneous love. Love pre-exists in the heart, and when it finds its object it leaps out and enters it and does its business, establishing a conviction, while the timid soul still tells itself it has no more than an "interest." But I do not delude myself. I saw and at once believed, and I knew what I saw and what I believed, and so strong was my conviction that even the three years that passed and the frustrations of the last week have not deprived me of it. Yes, I was sure. Furthermore, I still am. For it will not go away. I still see you as I saw you then, excited, plump, in a tight black dress, your arms bare, your hair loose, your feet in sandal-shoes. I have torn that dress from you a thousand times, but I have done it reverently, in my mind observing that same delicacy, that attention to detail I would observe in fact. Thus I have seen you naked, and I do not revile myself with the thought that what is only imaginary for me must be actual for one or many a man. It is my possession. The nakedness with which I have endowed you is solid and unique, both in the actuality it has for me, and in its expression, which is entirely its own and not compounded of other women. Nor is the look of your body a wish fulfilment, for I do not assemble you out of separate female perfections—that art of day dreaming! No, for your breasts, as I imagine them, are even too large for my preference and your thighs could do with

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a little less hair. I have, furthermore, distilled a set of odors to go with your hair and your arm pits, and these, again, are distinctive; and I have supplied your skin with textures, and have given you appropriate sounds—laughter for love play, a sharp intaking of the breath for passion, and a wildness of hissing and moaning devoid of all language. This is that solemn nakedness to which we bring not only our passion, but our capacity for a sensual revenge. But it is not brutal; it is tender. And above all it is persistent in the face of a thousand complications I can never make out.

And then the pencil in your mouth, the tongue stuck at me, and the conversation and your waiting for me and the walk and the invitation to your house, the lunch, and your promise and the happiness almost, almost reached, and the conviction established beyond overthrowing! Was it from this that I was to expect denial?

We lean toward the imperfect—it was too good to be true. But this is no explanation. It will satisfy only a shallow, a skeptical intelligence. The perfect must be true! What else is perfection, and why do we demand it? But however I explain it, I still do not understand. I refuse to believe my own reasons.

What then? I love you enough to think evil of you. I am angry enough to know that what I saw and believed, you, too, saw—but did not believe. You acknowledged a conviction without sharing it. And nothing human can be colder!

Look how similarities endanger us. You, with the pencil in your mouth, knew me well enough, from your own traits, to destroy me. I am of the same erotic type as you. I, too, must be fed. My whole life can be explained by hunger. You knew you would have to offer, give, yield. If only you had not known! If only your perception had been clouded with that animal stupidity for which we are, occasionally, so grateful in women! Or, if only I had known better! I should have known that a woman will make a concession on one point only when she has prepared some reservation on another. As it was, you managed to concede everything, yet withheld everything. The evil in your flirtatiousness was that it went beyond flirtation; it offered love, real love, in order to snatch it away. It was the old game played to its fullest, criminal in its intelligence, the *absolute* cheat.

Well, it's over and done with. Of course, in outdoing me you also had to deny yourself. But a woman will count her self-denial at a small cost when the game is so large and she masters it. But it's over,

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it's over. Yet it persists. Certain patterns are dangerous. We form them once and follow them always. And if a man will attach, as I have done, a whole morality to a single incident, he will always be at the mercy of "incidents." The insight he will gain will give him no peace. He will be forced to employ it everywhere, with all the subtle damage it can do him. And at a time like the present when there is no place for unhappy men, no understanding they can count on, no mood they can share, what good will their insight do them?

But, Ellen, I release you. I go back to my own cares, reluctantly, I admit, but with a certain confidence. My place in the world—see how quickly one can spring from his place in bed to his place in the world! Can a woman do as much?—my place in the world is assured, no matter how difficult it be, for I am my own assurance. I am that man—and there are many like me—whose place is entirely contained in his own being. So long as I exist, that is my place, my function. I do not justify myself. I merely point this out: I have so little, so little pride, so little belief, so little outward appetite, I am so pared down to my own core, that I cannot help believing I am an essential man. And besides, WPA will come back, have no fear. Do you think I wrote my report on pigeon racing for nothing? It stands there in the files, waiting, ready to be taken up again. Some day, when the war is over, and the machines have been removed from the old buildings, after the dust has settled and the activity has died down, the steel vaults will be unlocked and the steel files will be brought out, and the pigeons will flutter again. Once again the world will take account of us—we bare, pared, essential men. The earth will once again acknowledge loneliness, as real as her own mountains. What else can be done? We may be a generation—we may, as well, be an eternity. But perhaps a new wrinkle in disasters? Perhaps the night and the wolves and the waves we howled about back in the 'thirties—when there was still a little twilight—will really come down to blot out, swallow, and wash us away? What will be will be.

One only looks to his own accountable and natural future. But here, I shan't write much longer. The New Year is coming. Ellen, Ellen, at last I am free. One moment you were my great bitterness, and now I am in the clear, rid of you. My life will find another bitterness, perhaps of a higher fresher quality, perhaps even a bitterness in some successful thing. What does it matter? I am cushioned at the bottom and only look forward to what I may expect. For after all,

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what is humiliation? It does not endure forever. And when it has led us underground to our last comfort, look, it has served its purpose and it is gone. Who knows when new heights may not appear? A man has only so much in common with his experience. The rest he derives from God knows where.

I believe some men are capable of rising out of their own lives. They stand on the same ground as their brothers, but they are, somehow, transcendental, while their brothers are underground. Their only secret is a tremendous willingness—they do not struggle with themselves!

Ellen, all I mean to say is this: I still believe in human happiness, and in my own to boot. If I cannot make my claim on you, I will make it on life, demand that existence satisfy the longings it arouses. It must, it must! For that is happiness: the conviction that something is necessary.

But how dare I speak of happiness? After all, I was once convinced that you were necessary. And what is necessity without fulfilment? Is it possible? I shall say it is. Be gentle to the unfulfilled, be good to it. We are accustomed to sing the joys of the happy, the fulfilled men. Let us also sing the joys of the desolate, the empty men. Theirs is the necessity without fulfillment, but it is possible that even to them—who knows?—some joy may come.

I forgive you and release you, Ellen. You are beautiful—go. But God, if you only knew, if you only knew how willing I am—always—to take the risk of my happiness!

A Happy New Year!

Love,
Joseph

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Mr. Wheelwright's Wisdom

Ernest Nagel

In the Spring 1943 issue of *The Chimera,* Mr. Philip Wheelwright takes the trouble to comment on my contribution to the PARTISAN REVIEW "New Failure of Nerve" symposium. His article shows him to be highly skilled in the arts of condescension and polysyllabic name-calling, and I shall not dispute his mastery in these fields.* But he also tries to defend the thesis that "there are sources of valid insight, and indispensable factors in man's total wisdom, which cannot be decisively tested by scientific techniques." It is with this issue that I wish briefly to concern myself.

What is Mr. Wheelwright's defense? Apart from dogmatic affirmation, it consists entirely in pointing out certain alleged limitations of "scientific techniques," and in asserting as a consequence that "essentially human canons"—incapable of being stated as propositions verifiable "by the strict techniques of science"—must be taken as authoritative in considering problems affecting human destiny. However, he makes a case for his conclusion only by adopting a sophistical though familiar rhetorical device: he deliberately caricatures the claims of his critics by exaggerating them, and then scornfully rejects those claims as utterly absurd. More specifically, he identifies scientific *method* with the special techniques of a special science, namely, physics; and since he can challenge with apparent plausibility the practicality of employing that "method" for settling specifically human questions, he succeeds, to his own immense satisfaction, in laying low his naturalistic adversaries.

In point of fact, however, none of the contributors to the "New Failure of Nerve" symposium did identify the use of scientific method

* Since Mr. Wheelwright's style of thinking, unlike mine, is presumably not "monosemantical," he has suffered a curious lapse in interpreting my use of the term "malicious" (which I employed to characterize certain philosophies of science) as a term of abuse. My use of the word was modelled upon Santayana's characterization of Locke's psychology. Santayana employed it, as I did, to describe the outcome, and not the *motives,* of a certain type of analysis.

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with the use of one specialized technique of inquiry. And I am familiar with no naturalist, whether "positivist" or not, who recommends the application of the differential equations of modern physics for solving moral problems. Nor does a scientific naturalism stand or fall with the assumption that all warrantable propositions are expressible in quantitative terms. In history, in psychology, in biology, even in physics, propositions are entertained and asserted which involve only "qualitative" distinctions, without being thereby one bit less subject to the authority of scientific canons. On the contrary, though precision is a scientific ideal—an ideal which in some domains is most adequately realized when quantitative measurements are introduced—vague propositions may be accepted when precise ones are not attainable; and in any case, vague propositions will in general be at least the starting points for further inquiry. Vagueness, a certain amount of indefiniteness in the content of propositions, does not therefore constitute a theoretical obstacle to the use of scientific method. Moreover, no one familiar with the actual content and procedures of the sciences will be inclined to deny that for many propositions which are tentatively accepted the available evidence is incomplete and precarious, and that the inclusion of propositions into the body of certified doctrine requires the use of judgment and intellectual imagination whose exercise is not reducible to definite rules.

These observations are elementary, though not irrelevant to the consideration of Mr. Wheelwright's article; for if they are sound, they impugn the pertinence of nearly everything that he has to say. Naturalists do not deny that men have vital aspirations, luminous visions, or profound moving moments of living; they do deny that any of the products of such experiences are, taken by themselves, cases of *knowledge*. The fundamental contention of modern naturalists is that warranted beliefs, whether vague or precise, whether about nature or man, must be capable of standing up under the scrutiny of public examination. Such a scrutiny consists in the use of scientific method: in deducing the consequences entailed by one's assumptions, and in controlling the validity of those assumptions in the light of a critical use of sensory data.

There is room for commenting on but two of the specific points Mr. Wheelwright raises. Consider first his dictum that "spiritual qualities such as tonal beauty, nobility, and holiness cannot be either affirmed or denied of a situation on the basis of purely experimental

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techniques," and his connected claim that "there are valid kinds of evidence other than the publicly experimental." Now expressions such as "tonal beauty," "nobility," and "holiness" are notoriously vague if not thoroughly ambiguous, and there is room for doubt whether two people ever use them in exactly the same sense. I make the point only to suggest that it may be difficult to know what one is talking about when such terms are taken without some further analysis. It simply will not do to say that since those expressions are frequently used, there must be a common core of meaning associated with each of them. For terms like "democracy," "fascism," or "race," are also frequently used, and there is good evidence that not all who use them are making any objective attributions whatsoever.

For the sake of the argument, however, I shall assume that Mr. Wheelwright's terms do possess sufficiently clear meanings. The question then is how we can decide that a given individual does possess the attribute, say, of nobility. Thus, suppose we wish to determine whether Mr. Wheelwright has a noble character. Can we do so in any other way except on evidence that is publicly experimental—noting well that a public experiment is not necessarily one that is carried out with the techniques of the physical laboratory? Do we not have to note his actions, and come to some sort of decision on the basis of what is publicly observed or observable? It may happen, of course, that Mr. Wheelwright does not appear in public very often, or that even if he does so appear he does not become involved in actions of the sort deemed appropriate for judging nobility of character; the available evidence will then be quite undecisive. Or he may publish something, and his readers are led to conjecture that he is one sort of person rather than another; but unless his readers are overrash, they will treat their conjecture as a hypothesis, draw whatever conclusion they can which are entailed by it, wait for further observational data which will test them, and perhaps finally form a competent judgment on his spiritual qualities. But how does ascertaining whether Mr. Wheelwright is in fact noble differ in principle from ascertaining whether, for example, an electric current is flowing through a wire? My argument does *not* depend, it should be noted, on the assumption that the meaning of "being noble" can be specified *simply* in terms of overt behavior, though this possibility cannot be automatically ruled out. I recognize that many terms, for example "electric current," derive their meaning from a complicated theoretical framework, and

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that their meaning cannot in general be adequately specified by enumerating a definite class of observable attributes. My sole point is that even in the case of attributes which are defined in terms of a complex theory, a warranted decision as to their presence or absence in a situation can be made only on the basis of "public experiments."

Mr. Wheelwright may claim, however, that while other people can discover his spiritual qualities only on the basis of a procedure such as outlined, he himself has other means at his disposal. He may claim that he has a *direct insight* into his own character which others cannot have. I am not sure whether he does make such a claim, but if he should and if his claim were true, he would be unusually fortunate. For most men can discover what sort of creatures they are only by painful public experience: by noting their responses to men and events, and by piecing together the evidence so gathered. But however this may be, the essential point is that such a claim, were it made, would itself require adjudication—it could not be taken as self-certifying, and would have to be examined in the light of public evidence. But if this is admitted, the scientific naturalism for which I am arguing against Mr. Wheelwright is in principle also granted.

Consider next Mr. Wheelright's views on the possibility of explaining so-called "higher emergent qualities" (such as purposive behavior) in terms of theories of inorganic matter. He thinks that although the question is at present undecided if taken strictly, such explanations would be *practically worthless* even if tney were available; for according to him "no group of mundane scientists could ever live long enough to calculate the equation" connecting the movements of inorganic particles of matter with the actions of men. Moreover, and this is perhaps his chief point, although there may be material conditions for human behavior, that behavior is radically contingent and is not necessitated absolutely by those conditions: "No total synthesis, no super-super-formula comprehending all behavior-patterns in the universe is ever possible. For time is open; there is always a next case, which may or may not conform to the formulas already elaborated. . . . The really important, epoch-moulding, historically decisive actions of men have a way of defying the best laid predictions." For these reasons the human scene is said to be so distinct from inorganic nature that the logic which is authoritative for inquiry into the latter cannot be adequate for inquiry into the former.

But this is really a curious argument. In the first place, Mr.

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Wheelwright assumes a remarkable prescience as to what *will be* the structure of physical theory in terms of which human behavior may "ultimately" be explicable. He is convinced that no *practically adequate* physical explanation will ever be forthcoming. He may of course be right. But a hundred years ago he would doubtless have claimed with the same assurance that no practically adequate theory of mechanics would ever explain the phenomena of heat; and in this case he would most certainly have been wrong. Like everyone else, I do not *know* whether an explanation of human behavior in terms of some general theory of physics will ever be achieved. I do believe, however, that the hypothesis that such explanations may be given, has been, and continues to be, a most fruitful one, and is worth exploring to the utmost. But in the second place, Mr. Wheelwright introduces a glaringly red herring when he raises the question of the contingency of human behavior. In what way is the "openness" of time more relevant for the discussion of human behavior than it is for the study of inorganic phenomena? Is not his point concerning the alleged impossibility of an all-comprehensive formula just as pertinent for a philosophy of natural science as it is for a theory of human nature? The clear answer is that his observations are just as relevant and pertinent to the one case as they are to the other; he is therefore guilty of an obvious *non-sequitur* when he concludes to the inadequacy in matters of morals of the logical canons operative in physical inquiry. What has the alleged fact that the decisive actions of men defy the best laid predictions to do with the question whether there are other canons of cognitive validity than those employed and recognized in the positive sciences? Do best laid predictions in matters physical never go astray? And does he believe that the "human canons" he finds expressed in great works of literature enable us to anticipate the "epoch-moulding" acts of men? Surely his answer to this last question must be in the negative. But if the answer is negative, precisely what limitations of scientific method are exhibited by the fact that works of literature have a special subject-matter? Mr. Wheelwright has certainly produced no competent evidence to show that the "wisdom" he finds in such books as Plato's *Symposium* or *Hamlet* is not capable of "verification by the strict techniques of science"—unless, indeed, he begs the question at issue by equating "the strict techniques of science" with "the techniques of physical measurement."

Mr. Wheelwright is primarily a moralist whose chief concern is

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with problems involved in the discipline of "the Inner Self." The many questionable assumptions behind his distinction between "the inward" and "the outward" are undoubtedly the rock bottom premises from which he thinks, but this is hardly the place to consider them. It is worth noting, however, that according to him education should aim among other things, at "the discipline and encouragement of discriminating sensitivity to the best values which speak, or may speak, within men's hearts." Which values, and in what manner are they to be judged "best"? Men's hearts "speak" differently in different climes and at different times, and one cannot simply take the fact that values are "spoken" as evidence that they are valid or even compatible with one another. But on this crucial point Mr. Wheelwright wraps his wisdom in an aristocratic silence.

THESE PURISTS

Lovely! all the essential parts,
like an oyster without a shell
fresh and sweet tasting, to be
swallowed, chewed and swallowed.

Or better, a brain without a
skull. I remember once a guy in
our anatomy class dropped one
from the third floor window on
an organ grinder in Pine Street.

W. C. WILLIAMS

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THE INTELLECTUAL

What should the wars do with these jigging fools?

The man behind the book may not be man,
His own man or the book's or yet the time's,
But still be whole, deciding what he can
In praise of politics or German rimes;

But the intellectual lights a cigarette
And offers it lit to the lady, whose odd smile
Is the merest hyphen—lest he should forget
What he has been resuming all the while.

He talks to overhear, she to withdraw
To some interior femine fireside
Where the back arches, beauty puts forth a paw
Like a black puma stretching in velvet pride,

Making him think of cats, a stray of which
Some days sets up a howling in his brain,
Pure interference such as this neat bitch
Seems to create from listening disdain.

But talk is all the value, the release,
Talk is the very fillip of an act,
The frame and subject of the masterpiece
Under whose film of age the face is cracked.

His own forehead glows like expensive wood,
But back of it the mind is disengaged,
Self-sealing clock recording bad and good
At constant temperature, intact, unaged.

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But strange, his body is an open house
Inviting every passerby to stay;
The city to and fro beneath his brows
Wanders and drinks and chats from night to day.

Think of a private thought, indecent room
Where one might kiss his daughter before bed!
Life is embarrassed; shut the family tomb,
Console your neighbor for his recent dead;

Do something! die in Spain or paint a green
Gouache, go into business (Rimbaud did),
Or start another Little Magazine,
Or move in with a woman, have a kid.

Invulnerable, impossible, immune,
Do what you will, your will will not be done
But dissipate the light of afternoon
Till evening flickers like the midnight sun,

And midnight shouts and dies: I'd rather be
A milkman walking in his sleep at dawn
Bearing fat quarts of cream, and so be free,
Crossing alone and cold from lawn to lawn.

I'd rather be a barber and cut hair
Than walk with you in gilt museum halls,
You and the puma-lady, she so rare
Exhaling her silk soul upon the walls.

Go take yourselves apart, but let me be
The fault you find with everyman. I spit,
I laugh, I fight; and you, *l'homme qui rit,*
Swallow your stale saliva, and still sit.

October 24/43 KARL SHAPIRO

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History vs. The City of God

Richard V. Chase

LIKE previous centuries, ours has invented an abstract "man" who is supposed to embody the fundamental qualities of human nature. The twentieth-century "man" is irrational and religious. Pareto, and the other "Machiavellians," have endowed this "man" with what Pareto called a "sociology"; the psychoanalysts have supplied him with an unconscious full of overwhelming primordial images and tyrannical instincts; Bergson has given him a "life force" and a primitive religion. It has remained for A. J. Toynbee* to provide him with a world history.

Perhaps most of the irrationalists of our time have had their roots deep in the Christian religion. Their sense of the evil and treachery in human nature is often close to the sense of Original Sin. Their mysticism, especially in the case of Bergson, merges with Christian mysticism. With the exception of the neo-Thomists, however, Toynbee is the most overtly Christian of all; and we must go back to St. Augustine to understand Toynbee's idea of history.

When Gibbon wrote at the end of his *History* that he had "described the triumph of barbarism and religion," he grievously damaged the prestige of Christian historiography. But time heals wounds, and the tradition that ran from St. Augustine's *City of God* and Orosius' *History against the Pagans* in the fifth century to Bossuet's *Universal History* in the seventeeth has come down to Toynbee's *Study of History* in the twentieth. For although the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rejected the Augustinian historical theory, Toynbee has em-

* Arnold Joseph Toynbee was born in 1889; educated at Winchester and Balliol; Political Intelligence, 1918; delegate to the Paris Peace Conference; Professor of History at U. of London, etc. Three volumes of the *History* appeared in 1934 and three more in 1939. At least three more are yet to come.

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braced it anew, with the emotions of one who has come home after wandering frantically among the materialists. To Augustine, the sack of Rome heralded the end of the sinful City of the Pagans; Toynbee believes that we may have arrived at at similar crisis when western man "made a holocaust of his own children in our great Western Civil War of A.D. 1914-18." The age of reason and science which flourished from the time of Gibbon to our time becomes, in the mind of Toynbee, a new age of paganism. And as the Christian church inherited the Roman universal state, so, he hopes, a new church will inherit an Anglo-Saxon universal state. St. Augustine thought that history was one long preparation for the coming of the savior; Toynbee, who has heard of about 25 times as many civilizations as Augustine, still thinks so. Whereas Gibbon thought that progress was man's increasing ability to amend his own "crimes, follies and misfortunes," St. Augustine and Professor Toynbee think it is an ascension from the earthly City of Destruction to the heavenly City of God.

Toynbee's *History* shows how thoroughly we are repeating the religious experience of the late days of antiquity. The mysteries of death and resurrection, which filled the ancient world with the coming of the Oriental fertility cults, are the very fabric of *A Study of History*. That our own culture is deeply concerned with these matters is sufficiently proclaimed by works like *The Plumed Serpent, The Waste Land* and *Finnegans Wake*. The intuitions of the conservative professor of history have become those of Lawrence, Eliot and Joyce, though Toynbee would frown on these writers if he were acquainted with their writing. The apocalyptic announcement about the

Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London

and the searching "in stony places" for the resurrected life in Eliot's short poem are repeated with endless ramification in Toynbee's several thousand pages of universal history.

That history should be universal is one of Toynbee's basic dogmas; *A Study of History* tries to encompass all known civilizations. Toynbee is inspired by the wide visions of Ibn Khaldun, de Gobineau, Turgot and Lord Acton. He believes, with Acton, that a universal history does not have to be "a burden on the memory" and that it can be "an illumination of the soul." He attributes Acton's memorable failure ever to write his vast history of liberty to "the

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sterilizing influence of Industrialism upon historical thought." He believes that Acton's mind was paralyzed by the division-of-labor philosophy of historical writing, which has resulted in such disjointed compendia as the Cambridge Histories. Whether or not he is right about Lord Acton (and I don't think he is), Toynbee is certainly wrong in his belief that the mediocre compendium history written by specialists is the inevitable result of applying the scientific method to history. Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs* does not imply the Cambridge Histories any more than Sir Isaac Newton implies Henry Ford.

A world history, however, must be composed of the separate civilizations which the specialists have described. Toynbee rejects the belief of the Enlightenment that western culture is the single fruit of all previous societies. This idea, he says, indicates the overweening pride of "Homo Occidentalis Mechanicus," who thought of himself as a "Lord of Creation" on whose boundaries lived other kinds of people known as "Natives." There are, in fact, at least twenty-one civilizations in the history of the world of camparable merit and interest. Seven of these societies are still living, and of these ours is only one.

Toynbee singles civilizations out according to their religions; he disavows political, economic, environmental and aesthetic criteria, believing that these always prove superficial. His civilizations are thus the Egyptiac, Andean, Sinic, Minoan, Sumeric, Mayan, Syriac, Indic, Hittite, Hellenic, Western, Orthodox Christian (in Russia), Orthodox Christian (main body), Far Eastern (in Korea and Japan), Far Eastern (main body), Iranic, Arabic, Hindu, Mexic, Yucatec and Babylonic. But to think of societies as discrete units would be, according to Toynbee, to subscribe either to the fallacy of materialism or to the crude organic morphology of Spengler. He feels that there must be some encompassing medium. And this is where, having masterfully distinguished his twenty-one societies as "intelligible fields of study," Toynbee dissolves his distinctions into a mystic holism. He loses himself in long, loosely selected quotations from Gerald Heard (*The Ascent of Humanity*), General Smuts (*Holism and Evolution*) and Bergson. Bergson is usually the bridge on which he passes from his evidence to his cosmic generalizations. Bergson, says Toynbee, "feels Life and feels it as a whole"; Life is a continuum evolving toward the divine. The twenty-one civilizations are united across space and time by their creative *élan* and by their striving "upward"

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in the range of life above Sub-man to the stage of Superman. All human societies, including the modern primitive societies, have accomplished the first and so far the greatest of feats by mutating from the sub-human to the human. The twenty-one civilizations have all tried, unsuccessfully, to make the further mutation into the realm of Supermen, which Christians call the City of God.

Toynbee's general practice, then, is to enumerate the historical methods of his naturalist or scientific predecessors, to find them (along with the methods of the German idealists, culminating in Spengler) inadequate, and to convey his own meaning by the devices of religious mythology. He accuses the naturalists of failing to respect the Vital Principle, a mistake which he calls the "Apathetic Fallacy." One senses the relief and exaltation in the passage of *A Study of History* in which Toynbee, having laboriously collected his facts, makes his far-reaching generalizations. These passages are permeated with the spirit, as well as most of the words, of the New Testament. Science fails him on the brink of general truth; the study of matter gives way to the study of Life and Spirit.

The world mythology of death and resurrection—the myth of Christ is the most perfect example—is the truest intuition of mankind.

2.

The first three volumes of the *History* describe the genesis and growth of civilizations. When Toynbee asks himself how civilizations come into being, he first examines the two master explanations of Race and Environment. In an interpolated essay (a small masterpiece) he dismisses all racial theories of the Houston Stewart Chamberlain order. He then interprets Race to mean the Divine *élan* as it manifests itself in man. Toynbee canonizes Environment into the weapon of the Devil. Darwin's "variation," for instance, is really the striving of the Divine *élan;* "natural selection" is the work of the Devil through the environment. Civilizations are born by undergoing an "ordeal" in "response" to a "challenge." They must weather the titanic struggle of superhuman forces which arouse them from the static to the dynamic.

The myths of Faust and Job explain the birth process in cosmic terms. A society is tempted by the Devil to shake off its static torpor. The Devil challenges God by trying to destroy man; his office is to

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upset the static equilibrium, since God in His Perfection is incapable of doing so alone. By trying to destroy man, the environment has done the work of God. The challenge itself may take a physical or a human form. Deserts, mountain ranges, jungles, oceans, droughts, overpopulation, invasions, slavery, migrations, all have presented their challenge to man. There is a golden mean, however, in the severity of the challenge, and history is full of failures, testimony that the Devil has had the best of it. The Polynesians, who achieved the beginnings of a high civilization on Easter Island, were finally unable to sustain the formidable challenge of the ocean and have ever since responded only to the soft challenge of their islands. The Spartans petrified into an "arrested civilization" through over-specialization in response to an overly severe military challenge.

It will be observed that there is a large element of naturalism in this Toynbeean struggle of Challenge-and-Response. His account, for example, of how the Eskimos and the Nomads "reverted to animalism" by merging themselves with the functions of the animals is solidly and finely drawn. And his account of environmental forces generally shows a tenacious mind at work. At every important juncture of the book, however, when we feel that the facts warrant a toughly limited generalization, we are asked to follow Toynbee into the realms of myth and religion. But it is Toynbee's sense of the natural difficulty of human life, and not his walking with God, that lends dignity to his *History;* and sometimes it lends dignity to his God.

Civilizations grow after birth in a rhythmic pattern of stasis and movement by responding to a series of different challenges. The *élan* of Prometheus (the mythical type of the growth process) repeatedly overturns the static Zeus. As each ordeal it successfully sustained, the civilization comes nearer and nearer to the City of God. The criterion of growth is of course not an increasing command over the environment: it is the transfer of human energy and attention from the world to the mind, from the natural to the spiritual, from science to religion. The world seems ultimately contemptible to Toynbee, and the intellectual disciplines which deal closely with man's interactions with nature seem to be vulgar and even beastly techniques.

James Burnham sums up the historical theory of the "Machiavellians" (Mosca, Michels, Pareto) thus: "Historical . . . science is above all the study of the élite, its composition, its structure, and the mode of its relation to the non-élite." Burnham will find in Toynbee

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the world historian who meets his qualifications; but he will not find a substantial reason for regarding this method as "historical science." Pareto simply asserted the élite theory of history with an ill-tempered crankishness; Toynbee, on the other hand, *drifts* toward it, out of a deep religious reverence for sainthood. But the result is the same. Toynbee believes that civilizations are led "upward" by "gifted individuals," who form "creative minorities." The creative minority acts as a kind of middleman between God and the masses. It does not, according to Toynbee, rule by force while a civilization is still growing; it persuades the masses by "charm' and unconscious suggestion. The masses follow by acts of "mimesis," though just what these acts are is never made clear. The "gifted individuals" are those who can mystically relive in their souls the death and resurrection of the divine hero. They, and the civilization they lead, attain their goal by "the movement of Withdrawal-and-Return." They withdraw from the world, that is, when some great task faces them; in the privacy of the spirit they prepare themselves to return reborn to the world and take up the challenge.

At this point we begin to understand that Toynbee is writing a vast drama; in fact, a Greek tragedy. His idea of Greek tragedy is that of his fellow English anthropologist-Hellenists, Frazer, Jane Harrison and Gilbert Murray. In the hands of these scholars the Greek tragedy has come to mean the drama of the "eniautos daimon" or year spirit. T*he Golden Bough* described the worldwide foundations of the ritual death and rebirth of the fertility god. Jane Harrison in her *Prolegomena to Greek Religion* and *Themis* took this cycle of the death and rebirth of vegetation to be the central fact of Greek tragedy. But like Toynbee, she found it necessary to convert the Greeks to Bergsonism. The Greeks, we are told, worshipped *élan vital* through its representative, the spirit of the year. According to this school of thought the main elements of a Greek tragedy (more or less apparent in all the extant plays) are 1. the Agon or contest between the vegetative fertility of summer and the death-dealing winter; 2. the Pathos or the ritual slaying of the "eniautos daimon," which signified the temporary success of winter; and 3. the Epiphany or resurrection of the god with the promise of renewed life. In the Agon of the Greek divinity we perceive the Toynbeean contest of God in man with the Devil in the environment. The Pathos of a civilization occurs when it "withdraws" from the world, turning in upon itself

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behind its own borders, as its spiritual leaders withdraw from life to undergo the ordeal of submitting the conscious to the unconscious. This is the critical moment according to Toynbee (as one must agree if one has granted him the validity of the mystic experience at all), for all depends upon the return to the new life for the purpose of meeting the adversary. The Indians, says Toynbee, once failed in the person of the Buddha, who dissolved himself in Nirvana. The Greeks failed in the person of Plato, who withdrew but did not return to the world. The Romans failed in the person of Marcus Aurelius, who lost himself in the mystic City of Zeus. These men were annihilated in the mystic experience—dismembered like the Greek god of the tragedies in his *sparagmos;* the Christian Supermen of history, on the other hand, have returned from death transfigured, and have led society toward God.

Toynbee's theory of the growth of civilizations is clearly based on two fallacies. One is the notion that you have explained movement by asserting that there is an *élan* which makes things move. The other is the belief in mutations.* The evolution from matter to Sub-man to Man to Superman to God is accomplished, Toynbee holds, by a series of decisive mutations: this is "our present insight into the inwardness of natural phenomena" (Vol. III, p. 192). One is therefore mystified to learn (Vol. VI, p. 169) that "the principle of continuity is of the essence of the movement of growth in whatever terms we may try to describe or define it." This is plainly a contradiction, the result of thinking sometimes as a naturalist and sometimes as a supernaturalist. The full-time naturalist will agree with him on the general principle of evolutionary continuity. He will not agree that our present insight into nature discloses any mutations decisive or clear enough to support a general theory of biology, let alone history. The effect of this part-time naturalism is that Toynbee has really written two histories in one book, incompatible and largely irrelevant to each other.

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* "In the last twenty-five years . . . many new facts about evolution and heredity have been discovered, and the balance has now swung over heavily and, I think, permanently, in favour of Darwinism. Chief among these new facts is the discovery that most mutations are not large but very small steps of change. . . . In certain respects, indeed, modern evolutionary theory is more Darwinian than Darwin was himself." Julian Huxley in the *Virginia Quarterly Review,* Winter, 1943.

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3.

From the evidence of the twenty-one "intelligible fields of study," Toynbee concludes that a civilization breaks down when it is unable to meet the crucial challenge of its career. Civilizations are hounded by the "nemesis of creativity," the tendency, that is, of those who create to fall victim to their own tools and to render themselves unfit to meet new problems by having over-specialized their method of dealing with old ones. By a kind of "reversal of roles," they become the reactionaries. They now frustrate newly creative individuals, and the crucial challenge, presenting itself again and again in the same form and forcing the civilization into a more and more rigid pattern of response, is never successfully met. The once "creative minority" rigidifies itself into a "dominant minority," which can rule only by force, since it no longer attracts the emotions of the masses. The mimesis of the people, once poetic and pliable, now becomes mechanical, as an Orpheus, the ideal mimetic leader, turns into a Xerxes, "the drill sergeant with his whip," who rides herd on the masses. The dominant minority commits "the sin of Idolatry," i.e., infatuation with past techniques and institutions. The infatuation of Orthodox Christendom with the ghost of the Roman Empire and the self-idolization of Athens as "the Education of Hellas" are examples of this artificial stasis in the flux of time.

The "schism in society" between the dominant minority and the people is aggravated by further schisms as the civilization declines. Two small "proletariats," the internal and the external, break away from the civilization. The internal proletariat is the new creative minority; it "withdraws" from the world in order to create a universal church, which is the lifeblood of the civilization of the future. The external proletariat forms itself into barbarian war bands on the periphery of the dying civilization. The dominant minority purchases a reprieve from its fatal sentence by creating a universal state in the "Indian Summer" of the civilization; the universal state, besides achieving a temporary stasis by imposing a *Pax Oecumenica* on the world, also functions in the future by providing an institutional framework for the universal church of the future. Toynbee finds a great deal of evidence among his twenty-one societies to support this scheme, but its close correspondence to the disintegration of the Roman Empire and the birth of Western Christendom is apparent.

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As for the fate of our Western Civilization, Toynbee is inclined in these first six volumes to suspend final judgment. In our history since the sixteenth century, however, he perceives the "three and one-half beats of Rout and Rally" which spell out the doom of a dying society. The Rout of the religious wars of the seventeenth century was followed by the eighteenth-century Rally of peace and toleration. The more serious Rout of the war of Nationalism from the eighteenth to the twentieth century will be followed by the Rally of a *Pax Oecumenica*. If our civilization conforms to the others, the universal-state-to-be will pass through another beat of Rout and Rally before the final paroxysm of extinction.

We learned that during the process of growth, scientific control over the environment can not be taken as a criterion of progress. We are now told that science is a sign of failure. Indeed, if science is not actually the cause of social disintegration, it is at least an illness which "an ironic or malicious or retributive Providence is apt to bestow upon a society in disintegration." We have heard this often in our religious times. And Toynbee is making the common mistake of first confusing the parochial techniques of industrialism and war with the scientific method, and then convincing himself that the scientific method must be responsible for the plight of the world.

Volume V of *A Study of History* contains a remarkable list of the kinds of thought and feeling that appear in a declining society; but I shall not describe them here. The two master tendencies of a declining society, however, are "Archaism" and "Futurism," terms which Toynbee uses literally. Archaism appears in such various manifestations as the dairying activities of Marie Antoinette, the revival of the Irish language in Eire, and the enslavement of the Greeks to the memory of the ancient City of Cecrops. But the brittle world of the archaist is doomed to be smashed by the elemental *élan*. Futurism, per se, appears in the mechanical abolition of the past—for example in the Westernization of Turkey, and in the classic Chinese case of the Burning of the Books by the Emperor Ts'in She Hwang-ti. It is proof both of Toynbee's celestial, bird's-eye-view method and of the mistiness of his thinking that after basing his theory of growth on Bergson, he presents Bergson as an example of "the anti-intellectual Futurism" of our time, and even shows that the "gentle" Bergson and "violent" totalitarianism have a common animus. The futurist and the archaist are predestined to fail because their utopias are mundane.

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But futurism points the way of salvation. In his failure to capture the mundane future, the futurist glimpses the true path of Detachment and Transfiguration. The ideal creative individual of a disintegrating society is the dying savior-god—Christ and, in their several civilizations, Zagreu, Tammuz, Atts, Balder, Adonis and Osiris—whose resurrection shows man the way out of the City of Destruction. Thus the hope of a declining is still the hope of a growing civilization: the mystic experience of detachment and rebirth. Sir James Frazer wrote the history of the dying gods without losing his faith in rational thought. But to Toynbee, Frazer's long catalogue of the gods of death and resurrection seems to say only that "one generation passeth away and another generation cometh" and that "there is no new thing under the Sun." Frazer, Toynbee would say, has committed the Apathetic Fallacy by not understanding the mystic message of the second birth which these fertility gods had to give. And so Toynbee, the greatest of living historians, joins that earnest quest of our time after the elusive wraith of the crucial experience of the human being: his birth.

4.

A Study of History is a startling achievement of the historical imagination. It has an extraordinary wealth of sensitive erudition, which is occasionally marshalled into a beautiful synthesis of history and mythology. One hopes that because of Toynbee the instruments of historical study will be made more sensitive, that historical analysis will be made more flexible and that the imagination will learn to encompass the ranges of time and space more knowingly. But precisely because Toynbee himself loses his sensitivity when he passes from nature to myth, he is able to convince himself that the two are really one. As Lionel Trilling has said (PARTISAN REVIEW, May-June, 1942)

> . . . if the historical sense is always with us, it must, for that reason, be refined and made more exact. Above all, it must be kept complicated. History, like science and art, implies abstraction. . . . But in making our abstraction, we ought to be aware of what we are doing; we ought to remember that our abstraction is not equivalent to the infinite complication of events from which we have abstracted. The historian . . . should always be humbly aware of the limits of his abstraction and be willing to complicate it.

Toynbee often alleges that the philosophical conclusions of the En-

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lightenment were not humble enough—indeed, he offers public expiations for the excessive pride of rationalism. But he has far less of humbleness, in Trilling's sense, than the thinkers of the Enlightenment, though, like other religious men, he goes about the grandiose business of the spirit as if he were performing an act of abject self-discipline. He constantly makes the unwarranted abstractions of which Trilling speaks: he abstracts a mythical élite from the masses, he abstracts the mind and its processes from their genetic situations, and in doing so, he all but separates history from man.

I think we must require of the historian that he never forget the social realities of the present. Toynbee's English predecessors, like Gibbon, Macaulay and Lecky, wrote history with the practical intent of illuminating the obscure areas of present social thinking. Toynbee does not illuminate the present: he dissolves it in his immense sweep of past and future. He has, nevertheless, an implicit message for us about the present. If we become a complete Toynbeean, we shall believe that enlightened social action is degrading or, at best, fruitless. We shall believe that the wreckage of our time is an inevitable way-station in a pre-determined cycle of history, and that even if we had seriously tried, we could have done nothing to alter the course of the cycle. We shall believe, furthermore, that though some élites are "bad" and oppressive, others are "good" and humane. But if the Enlightenment taught us one simple lesson by its estimate of the Christian élite, it was that this is not so. The principles and policies of Toynbee's saintly élite (like those of *all* élites), not having been derived from the study of nature and man, can be imposed on them only by the violence of a form that does not fit its substance.

One finishes Toynbee's *History* with the sense of having had a great and worthwhile experience. But the historian, one feels, should not ask us to exchange the possibilities and probabilities of the real world for the irrelevant mysteries of a celestial tragedy. I missed in Toynbee the clear-headed empiricism and the natural sarcasm of his English predecessors. I missed the sense, in short, of what men have done, what men are doing and what men ought to do.

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The Ballad of Billie Potts

Robert Penn Warren

(When I was a child I heard this story from an old lady who was a relative of mine. The scene, according to her version, was in the section of Western Kentucky known as "Between the Rivers," the region between the Cumberland and the Tennessee. Years later, I came across another version in a book on the history of the outlaws of the Cave Inn Rock. The name of Bardstown in the present account refers to Bardstown, Kentucky, where the first race track west of the mountains was laid out late in the eighteenth century.)

Big Billie Potts was big and stout
In the land between the rivers.
His shoulders were wide and his gut stuck out
Like a croker of nubbins and his holler and shout
Made the bob-cat shiver and the black-jack leaves shake
In the section between the rivers.
He would slap you on your back and laugh.

Big Billie had a wife, she was dark and little
In the land between the rivers,
And clever with her wheel and clever with her kettle,
But she never said a word and when she sat
By the fire her eyes worked slow and narrow like a cat
In the land between the rivers.
Nobody knew what was in her head.

They had a big boy with fuzz on his chin
So tall he ducked the door when he came in,
A clabber-headed bastard with snot in his nose
And big red wrists hanging out of his clothes
And a whicker when he laughed where his father had a beller
In the section between the rivers.

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They called him Little Billie.
He was their darling.

(It is not hard to see the land, what it was.
Low hills, and oak. The fetid bottoms where
The slough uncoiled and in the tangled cane,
Where no sun comes, the muskrat's astute face
Was lifted to the yammering jay; then dropped.
Some cabin where the shag-bark stood and the
Magnificent tulip-tree; both now are gone.
But the land is there, and as you top a rise,
Beyond you all the landscape steams and simmers
—The hills, now gutted, red, cane-brake and the black-jack yet.
The oak leaf steams unders the powerful sun.
"Mister, is this the right road to Paducah?"
The red face, seamed and gutted like the hills,
Slow under time, and with the innocent savagery
Of Time, the bleared eyes rolling, answers from
Your dream: "They names hit so, but I ain't bin.")

Big Billie was the kind who laughed but could spy
The place for a ferry where folks would come by
In the land between the rivers.
He built an inn and folks bound West
Hitched their horses there to take their rest
And grease the gall and grease the belly
And jaw and spit under the trees.
Big Billie said: "Git down, friend, and take yore ease!"
He would slap you on your back and set you at his table.

(Leaning and slow, you see them move
In massive passion colder than any love:
Their lips move but you do not hear the words
Nor trodden twig nor fluted irony of birds
Nor hear the rustle of the heart
That, heave and settle, gasp and start,
Heaves like a fish in the ribs' dark basket borne
West from the great water's depth whence it was torn.

Their names are like the leaves, but are forgot

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—The slush and swill of the world's great pot
That foamed at the mountain-lip, and spilled
Like quicksilver across green baize, the unfulfilled
Disparate glitter, gleam, wild symptom, seed
Flung in the long wind: silent, proceed
Past meadow, salt-lick, and the lyric swale;
Enter the arbor, shadow of trees, fade, fail.)

Big Billie was sharp at swap and trade
And could smell the nest where the egg was laid,
He could read and cipher and they called him squire
In the land between the rivers.
And he added up his money while he sat by the fire
And sat in the shade while folks sweated and strove,
For he was the one who fatted and throve
In the section between the rivers.
"Thank you kindly, sir," Big Billie would say
When the man in the black coat paid him at streak of day
And swung to the saddle and was ready to go
And rode away and didn't know
That he was already as good as dead,
For at midnight the message had been sent ahead:
"Man in black coat, riding bay mare with star."

(There was a beginning but you cannot see it.
There will be an end but you cannot see it.
They will not turn their faces to you though you call.
Who pace a logic merciless as light,
Whose law is their long shadow on the grass,
Sun at the back; pace, pass,
And passing nod in that glacial delirium
While the tight sky shudders like a drum
And speculation rasps its idiot nails
Across the dry slate where you did the sum.

The answer is in the back of the book but the page is gone.
And grandma told you to tell the truth but she is dead.
And heedless, their hairy faces fixed
Beyond your call or question now, they move

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Under the infatuate weight of their wisdom,
Precious but for the preciousness of their burden,
Sainted and sad and sage as the hairy ass, who bear
History like bound faggots, with stiff knees;
And breathe the immaculate climate where
The lucent leaf is lifted, lank beard fingered, by no breeze,
Rapt in the fabulous complacency of fresco, vase, or frieze:

And the testicles of the fathers hang down like old lace.)

Little Billie was full of piss and vinegar
And full of sap as a maple tree
And full of tricks as a lop-eared pup,
So one night when the runner didn't show up,
Big Billie called Little and said, "Saddle up,"
And nodded toward the man was taking his sup
With his belt unlatched and his feet to the fire.
Big Billie said, "Give Amos a try,
Fer this feller takes the South Fork and Amos'll be nigher
Than Baldy or Buster, and Amos is sly
And slick as a varmint, and I don't deny
I lak bizness with Amos fer he's one you kin trust,
And hit looks lak they's mighty few.
Amos will split up fair and square."

Little Billie had something in his clabber-head
In addition to snot, and he reckoned he knew
How to skin a cat or add two and two.
So long before the sky got red
Over the land between the rivers,
He hobbled his horse back in the swamp
And squatted on his hams in the morning dew and damp
And scratched his stomach and grinned to think
How his Pap would be proud and his Mammy glad
To know what a thriving boy they had.
He always was a good boy to his darling Mammy.

(Think of yourself riding away from the dawn,
Think of yourself and the unnamed ones who had gone

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Before, riding, who rode away from *goodbye, goodbye,*
And toward *hello,* toward Time's unwinking eye;
And like the cicada had left, at cross-roads or square,
The old shell of self, thin, ghostly, translucent, light as air:
At dawn riding into the curtain of unwhispering green,
Away from the vigils and voices into the green
World, land of the innocent bough, land of the leaf.
Think of your face green in the submarine light of the leaf.

Or think of yourself crouched at the swamp-edge,
Dawn-silence past last owl-hoot and not yet at day-verge
First bird-stir, titmouse or drowsy warbler not yet.
You touch the grass in the dark and your hand is wet.
Then light: and you wait for the stranger's hoofs on the soft trace,
And under the green leaf's translucence the light bathes your face.

Think of yourself at dawn: Which are you? What?)

Little Billie heard hoofs on the soft grass,
But he squatted and let the rider pass,
For he didn't want to waste good lead and powder
Just to make the slough-fish and swamp-buzzards prouder
In the land between the rivers.
But he saw the feller's face and thanked his luck
It was the one Pap said was fit to pluck.
So he got on his horse and cantered up the trace.
Called, "Hi thar!" and the stranger watched him coming,
And sat his mare with a smile on his face,
Just watching Little Billie and smiling and humming.
Little Billie rode up and the stranger said,
"Why bless my heart, if it ain't Little Billie!"

"Good mornen," said Billie, and said, "My Pap
Found somethin you left and knowed you'd be missen,
And he ain't wanten nuthin nor proper his'n."
But the stranger did nothing but smile and listen
Polite as could be to what Billie said.
But he must have had eyes in the side of his head
As they rode along beside the slough

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In the land between the rivers,
Or known what Billie was out to do,
For when Billie said, "Mister, I've brung hit to you,"
And reached his hand for it down in his britches,
The stranger just reached his own hand, too.

"Boom!" Billie's gun said, and the derringer, "Bang!"
"Oh, I'm shot!" Billie howled and grabbed his shoulder.
"Not bad," said the stranger, "for you're born to hang,
But I'll save some rope 'fore you're a minute older
If you don't high-tail to your honest Pap
In the section between the rivers."
Oh, Billie didn't tarry and Billie didn't linger,
For Billie didn't trust the stranger's finger
And didn't admire the stranger's face
And didn't like the climate of the place,
So he turned and high-tailed up the trace,
With blood on his shirt and snot in his nose
And pee in his pants for he'd wet his clothes,
And the stranger just sits and admires how he goes,
And says, "Why, that boy would do right well back on the Bardstown track!"

"You fool!" said his Pap, but his Mammy cried
To see the place where the gore-blood dried
Round the little hole in her darling's hide.
She wiped his nose and patted his head,
But Pappy barred the door and Pappy said,
"That bastard has maybe got some friends
In the section between the rivers,
And you can't say how sich bizness ends
And a man ain't sure he kin trust his neighbors,
Fer thar's mortal spite fer him sweats and labors."
He didn't ask Little how he felt,
But said, "Two hundred in gold's in my money belt,
And take the roan and the brand-new saddle
And stop yore blubberen and skeedaddle,
And the next time you try and pull a trick
Fer God's sake don't talk but do hit quick."

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So little Billie took his leave
And left his Mammy there to grieve
And left his Pappy in Old Kaintuck
And headed West to try his luck
And left the land between the rivers,
For it was Roll, Missouri,
It was Roll, roll, Missouri.
And he was gone nigh ten long year
And never sent word to give his Pappy cheer
Nor wet pen in ink for his Mammy dear.
For Little Billie never was much of a hand with a pen-staff.

(There is always another country and always another place.
There is always another name and another face.
And the name and the face are you, and you
The name and the face, and the stream you gaze into
Will show the adoring face, show the lips that lift to you
As you lean with the implacable thirst of self,
As you lean to the image which is yourself,
To set the lip to lip, fix eye on bulging eye,
To drink not of the stream but of your deep identity.
But water is water and it flows,
Under the image on the water the water coils and goes
And its own beginning and its end only the water knows.

There are many countries and rivers in them
—Cumberland, Tennessee, Ohio, Colorado, Pecos, Little Big Horn.
And Roll, Missouri, roll.
But there is only water in them.

And in the new country and in the new place
The eyes of the new friend will reflect the new face
And his mouth will speak to frame
The syllables of the new name
And the name is you and is the agitation of the air
And is the wind and the wind runs and the wind is everywhere.

The name and the face are you.
The name and the face are always new

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And they are you.
Are new.

For they have been dipped in the healing flood.
For they have been dipped in the redeeming flood.
For they have been dipped in Time
And Time is only beginnings
Time is only and always beginnings
And is the redemption of our crime
And is our Saviour's priceless blood.

For Time is always the new place,
And no-place.
For Time is always the new name and the new face,
And no-name and no-face.

For Time is motion
For Time is innocence
For Time is West.)

Oh, who is coming along the trace,
Whistling along in the late sunshine,
With a big black hat above his big red face
And a long black coat that swings so fine?
Oh, who is riding along the trace
Back to the land between the rivers,
With a big black beard growing down to his guts
And silver mountings on his pistol-butts
And a belt as broad as a saddle-girth
And a look in his eyes like he owned the earth?
And meets a man riding up the trace
And looks right sharp and scans his face
And says, "Durn if'n hit ain't Joe Drew!"
"I reckin hit's me," says Joe and gives a spit,
"But whupped if'n I figger how you knows hit,
Fer if'n I'm Joe, then who air you?"
And the man with black beard says: "Why, I'm Little Billie!"
And Joe Drew says: "Wal, I'll be whupped."

"Be whupped," Joe said, "and whar you goen?"

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"Oh, I'm just visiten back whar I done my growen
In the section between the rivers,
Fer I bin out West and taken my share
And I reckin my luck helt out fer fair,
So I done come home," Little Billie said,
"To see my folks if'n they ain't dead."
"Ain't dead," Joe answered, and shook his head,
"But that's the best a man kin say,
Fer hit looked lak when you went away
You taken West yore Pappy's luck
And maybe now you kin bring it back."
Little Billie laughed and jingled his pockets and said: "Ain't nuthen wrong with my luck."

And said: "Wal, I'll be gitten on home
But after yore supper why don't you come
And we'll open a jug and you tell me the news
In the section between the rivers.
But not too early fer hit's my aim
To git some fun 'fore they know my name,
And tease 'em and fun 'em, fer you never guessed
I was Little Billie what went out West."
And Joe Drew said: "Durn if'n you always wusn't a hand to git yore fun."

(Over the plain, over mountain and river, drawn,
Wanderer with slit-eyes adjusted to distance,
Drawn out of distance, drawn from the great plateau
Where the sky heeled in the unsagging wind and the cheek burned,
Who stood beneath the white peak that glimmered like a dream,
And spat, and it was morning and it was morning.
You lay among the wild plums and the kildees cried.
You lay in the thicket under the new leaves and the kildees cried,
For all your luck, for all the astuteness of your heart,
And would not stop and would not stop,
And the clock ticked all night long in the furnished room
And would not stop
And the *El*-train passed on the quarters with a whish like a terrible broom

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And would not stop
And there is always the sound of breathing in the next room
And it will not stop
And the waitress says, "Will that be all, sir, will that be all?"
And will not stop
And the valet says, "Will that be all, sir, will that be all?"
And will not stop
For nothing is ever all and nothing is ever all,
For all your experience and your expertness of human vices and of valor
At the hour when the ways are darkened.

Though your luck held and the market was always satisfactory,
Though the letter always came and your lovers were always true,
Though you always received the respect due to your position,
Though your hand never failed of its cunning and your glands always thoroughly knew their business,
Though your conscience was easy and you were assured of your innocence,
You became gradually aware that something was missing from the picture,
And upon closer inspection exclaimed: "Why I'm not in it at all!"
Which was perfectly true.

Therefore you tried to remember when you had last had whatever it was you had lost,
But it was a long time back.
And you decided to retrace your steps from that point,
But it was a long way back.
It was, nevertheless, absolutely essential to make the effort,
And since you had never been a man to be deterred by difficult circumstances,
You came back.
For there is no place like home.)

He joked them and he teased them and he had his fun
And they never guessed that he was the one
Had been Mammy's darling and Pappy's joy
When he was a great big whickering boy

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In the land between the rivers,
And he jingled his pockets and he took his sop
And patted his belly which was full nigh to pop
And wiped the buttermilk out of his beard
And took his belch and up and reared
Back from the table and cocked his chair
And said: "Old man, ain't you got any fresh drinken water, this here ain't fresher'n a hoss-puddle?"
And the old woman said: "Pappy, why don't you take the young gentleman down to the spring so he kin git hit good and fresh?"
And the old woman gave the old man a straight look.
She gave him the bucket but it was not empty but it was not water.

Oh, the stars are shining and the meadow is bright
But under the trees is dark and night
In the land between the rivers.
Oh, on the trace the fireflies spark
But under the trees is night and dark,
And way off yonder is the whippoorwill
And the owl off yonder hoots on the hill
But under the trees is dark and still
In the section between the rivers.
And the leaves hang down in the dark of the trees
And there is the spring in the dark of the trees
And there is the spring as black as ink
And one star in it caught through a chink
Of the leaves that hang down in the dark of the trees,
And the star is there but it does not wink.
And Little Billie gets down on his knees
And props his hands in the same old place
To sup the water at his ease;
And the star is gone but there is his face.
"Just help yoreself," Big Billie said;
Then set the hatchet in his head.
They went through his pockets and they buried him in the dark of the trees.
"I figgered he was a ripe 'un," the old man said.
"Yeah, but you wouldn't done nuthen hadn't been fer me," the old woman said.

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(The reflection is shadowy and the form not clear,
For the hour is late, is late, and scarcely a glimmer comes here
Under the leaf, the bough, in its innocence dark;
And under your straining face you can scarcely mark
The darkling gleam of your face little less than the water dark.

But perhaps what you lost was lost in the pool long ago
When childlike you lost it and then in your innocence rose to go
After kneeling, as now, with your thirst beneath the leaves;
And years it lies here and dreams in the depth and grieves,
More faithful than mother and father in the light or dark of the leaves.

But after, after the irrefutable modes and marches,
After waters that never quench the thirst in the throat that parches,
After sleep that sieves the long day's dubieties
And the cricket's corrosive wisdom under the trees,
After the rumor of wind and the bright anonymities,

You come, weary of greetings and the new friend's smile,
Weary of art of the stranger, worn in the wanderer's wile,
Weary of innocence and the husks of Time,
Prodigal, back to the homeland of no-Time,
To ask forgiveness and the patrimony of your crime;

And kneel in the untutored night as to demand
What gift—Oh, father, father—from that dissevering hand?)

"And whar's Little Billie?" Joe Drew said.
"Air you crazy," said Big, "and plum outa yore head,
Fer you knows he went West nigh ten long year?
"Went West," Joe said, "but I seen him here
Riden up the trace as big as you please
With a long black coat comen down to his knees
And a big black beard comen down to his guts
And silver mountens on his pistol-butts
And he said out West how he done struck
It rich and wuz bringen you back yore luck.
"I shore-God could use some luck," Big Billie said,
But his woman wet her lips and craned her head

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And said: "Come riden with a big black beard, you say?"
And Joe: "Oh, hit wuz Billie as big as day."
And the old man's eyes bugged out of a sudden and he croaked like a sick bull-frog and said: "Come riden with a long black coat?"

Oh, the night is still and the grease-lamp low
And the old man's breath comes wheeze and slow.
Oh, the blue flame sucks on the old rag wick
And the old woman's breath comes sharp and quick,
And there isn't a sound under the roof
But her breath's hiss and his breath's puff,
And there isn't a sound outside the door
As they hearken but cannot hear any more
The creak of the saddle or the plop of the hoof,
For a long time now Joe Drew's been gone
And left them sitting there alone
While the dark outside gets big and still,
For the owl doesn't hoot off there on the hill
Any more and is quiet, and the whippoorwill
Is quiet in the dark of the trees and still
In the land between the rivers,
And so they sit and breathe and wait
And breathe while the night gets big and late,
And neither of them gives move or stir
And she won't look at him and he won't look at her.
He doesn't look at her but he says: "Git me the spade."

She grabbled with her hands and he dug with the spade
Where the leaves let down the dark and shade
In the land between the rivers.
She grabbled like a dog in the hole they made,
But stopped of a sudden and then said,
"I kin put my hand on his face."
They light up a pine-knot and lean at the place
Where the man in the black coat slumbers and lies
With trash in his beard and dirt on his face;
And the torch-flame shines in his wide-open eyes.
Down the old man leans with the flickering flame
And moves his lips, says; "Tell me his name."

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"Ain't Billie, ain't Billie," the old woman cries,
"Oh, hit ain't my Billie, fer he wuz little
And helt to my skirt while I stirred the kittle
And called me Mammy and hugged me tight
And come in the house when hit fell night."
But the old man leans down with the flickering flame
And croaks: "But tell me his name."
"Oh, he ain't got none, fer he just come riden
From some fer place whar he'd bin biden,
And ain't got a name and never had none,
But Billie, my Billie, he had one,
And hit wuz Billie, hit wuz his name."
But the old man croaked: "Tell me his name."
"Oh, he ain't got none and hit's all the same.
But Billie had one, and he wuz little
And offen his chin I would wipe the spittle
And wiped the drool and kissed him thar
And counted his toes and kissed him whar
The little black mark wuz under his tit,
Shaped lak a clover under his left tit
With a shape fer luck and I'd kiss hit—"
And the old man blinks in the pine-knot flare
And his mouth comes open like a fish for air,
Then he says right low, "I had nigh fergot."
"Oh, I kissed him on his little luck-spot
And I kissed and he'd laff as lak as not—"
The old man said: "Git his shirt open."
The old woman opened the shirt and there was the birthmark under the left tit.
It was shaped for luck.

(The bee knows, and the eel's cold ganglia burn,
And the sad head lifting to the long return,
Through brumal deeps, in the great unsolsticed coil,
Carries its knowledge, navigator without star,
And under the stars, pure in its clamorous toil,
The goose hoots north where the starlit marshes are.
The salmon heaves at the fall, and wanderer, you
Heave at the great fall of Time, and gorgeous, gleam

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In the powerful arc, and anger and outrage like dew,
In your plunge, fling, and plunge to the thunderous stream:
Back to the silence, back to the pool, back
To the high pool, motionless, and the unmurmuring dream.
And you, wanderer, back,
Brother to pinion and the pious fin that cleave
Their innocence of air and the disinfectant flood
And wing and welter and weave
The long compulsion and the circuit hope
Back,
And bear through that limitless and devouring fluidity
The itch and humble promise which is home.
And you, wanderer, back,
For the beginning is death and the end may be life.
For the beginning was definition and the end may be definition,
And our innocence needs, perhaps, new definition,
And the wick needs the flame
But the flame needs the wick.
And the father waits for the son.
The hour is late,
The scene familiar even in shadow,
The transaction brief,
And you, wanderer, back,
After the striving and the wind's word,
To kneel
Here in the evening empty of wind or bird,
To kneel in the sacramental silence of evening
At the feet of the old man
Who is evil and ignorant and old,
To kneel
With the little black mark under your heart,
Which is your name,
Which is shaped for luck,
Which is your luck.)

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Henry James' Portrait of the Artist

F. O. Matthiessen

JAMES' prefaces have established themselves exactly as he envisaged them to Howells, as "a sort of comprehensive manual or *vademecum* for aspirants in our arduous profession." No other writer of fiction has bequeathed a comparable body of discourse for the understanding of his art. Two of his novels, *Roderick Hudson* and *The Tragic Muse,* have for their respective heroes a sculptor and a painter. But another grouping of James' work, to which far less consideration has been paid, presents even more intimately, if in the guise of fable, his portrait of the writer. He himself called attention to his stories dealing with the life of art by composing one of the volumes of his collected edition from them: *The Lesson of the Master, The Death of the Lion, The Next Time, The Figure in the Carpet,* and *The Coxon Fund.* But a single volume would not hold them all, and they ran part way through the next: *The Author of Beltraffio,* and four shorter pieces, *The Middle Years, Greville Fane, Broken Wings,* and *The Tree of Knowledge.* The last of these shades off into the treatment characteristic of many other James' stories: it is not primarily about the nature of art or of the artist; it uses the situation of a sculptor, whose family are in loyal conspiracy to hide from him his utter lack of talent, for the kind of psychological concealments and revelation so dear to James. *The Coxon Fund,* again, explicitly sets out to present the type of peculiarly helpless artistic temperament represented by Coleridge. But the center of reference in the others is to problems which James knew from the inside and whose urgency was ever with him, problems of the writer and his audience, of the lack of intelligent appreciation and of the demands of his craft. They also dramatize the issue which is still our issue, the relation of the artist to society.

The title stories of the two volumes, *The Lesson of the Master*

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(1888) and *The Author of Beltraffio* (1884), deal, in different ways, with the split between life and art. The one "lesson" which Henry St. George drills into young Paul Overt is not to be like him. The Master has reaped all the material rewards of a successful writer, but he has ceased to write important books and has come to look like "a lucky stockbroker." The choice that he insists upon between the world and the supremely exacting mistress of art may sound curiously dated to a generation whose most effective symbol of the artist has been a figure like Malraux, gathering the knowledge for his writing as he served in the air force for Loyalist Spain. But the half century since Henry St. George has known far more stream-lined ways of selling out than that smooth English gentleman ever dreamed of, and the choice still remains, even if not cast in James' monastic terms.

Equally dated is "the gospel of art" enunciated by Mark Ambient in the pages of his masterpiece *Beltraffio*. The *donnée* here, as James indicated in a still unpublished notebook, came to him from an anecdote he had heard about John Addington Symonds (not about Stevenson, as has long been the gossip). A situation was suggested by the reported cleavage between Symonds and his wife, who, in no sort of sympathy with his books, disapproved of their tone as "immoral, pagan, hyperaesthetic." The story which James invented to dramatize such a situation concentrated on the battle between Mark Ambient and his conventionally Christian wife over the control of their child, and reached its lurid climax in her deliberately letting the boy die from an attack of diphtheria rather than expose him to what she conceived to be the corruption of his pagan father.

James worked under two handicaps here. He made Mark Ambient so completely the correct English gentleman that he hardly succeeds in persuading us that he had really imagined him as a pagan sensualist. And increasing this unreality is the fact that he set himself to dramatize the aesthetic gospel of the eighties without quite indicating, perhaps without being quite sure at this stage of his development, exactly how much of it he accepted for himself. He was later to portray in *The Tragic Muse* (1890), the brilliant futility of the aesthetic in the eerie figure of Gabriel Nash. In *The Author of Beltraffio* he made some fine humorous thrusts at the excesses of the movement. Nature faithfully copied art in Ambient's surroundings; even the creepers on the brown old walls appeared to have been borrowed from a pre-Raphaelite masterpiece. And as though in revenge

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for his aestheticism, Ambient's sister, who, in her faded velvet robe, seemed to have the notion that "she made up very well as a Rossetti," was a weirdly affected imitation of everything that in Ambient was original.

Ambient's own intense devotion to "every manifestation of human energy" is close to Pater's. And although James was to speak, a decade after this story, of Pater's having had "a phosphorescence, not a flame," there seems an inescapable kinship between Pater's aspiration to *be* the hard gem-like flame and Strether's famous exhortation to *live*. Moreover, when Strether tries to convey the multiple-imaged fascination of Madame de Vionnet in likening her to a Renaissance medallion, "to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud," "to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge," to Cleopatra herself in her variety, we are not far from the elaborate spell of Pater's Mona Lisa. A further comparison would have to reckon with the fact that James' recurrent use of the word "morality" has a residue, quite foreign to Pater, of the values of James' transcendentalist father. For Pater, despite his debt to Arnold, would hardly have been able to rise to James' classic formulation, in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady,* that there is "no more nutritive or suggestive truth . . . than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it." Yet Pater and James would be in accord with Mark Ambient's "passion for form," and likewise with his conviction that the artist must not falsify or smooth away details, but "must give the impression of life itself."

The stories where James is writing from the heart of his own aesthetic convictions are the best of the group, most of which belong to the years 1893-6. These were crucial years for James. He had felt that with *The Tragic Muse* he had reached a dead-end with the long novel, and had turned to his anxious experiment with the stage. The failure of *Guy Domville,* early in 1895, marked the end of that chapter, and only a couple of weeks later he was writing to Howells: "I *have* felt, for a long time past, that I have fallen upon evil days—every sign or symbol of one's being in the least *wanted,* anywhere or by any one having so utterly failed. A new generation, that I know not, and mainly prize not, has taken universal possession." One great change from the old days was that James had now found that the magazines would hardly accept him any more, a serious matter for

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an artist now past fifty. He had only one answer: "Produce again—produce; produce better than ever, and all will yet be well." And even before the end of his letter to Howells he had rallied to the point of taking delight in the fact that he was "bursting with ideas and subjects."

He had already reached a partial resolution of his dilemma by dramatizing the problems over which he had been brooding, even though he could find for some of the resulting stories no more likely channel of publication than *The Yellow Book*. *The Death of the Lion* was printed by Harland with éclat as the leading item in his first issue (1894), though James was increasingly to feel the incongruity of having appeared among the newer aesthetes, the descendants of Pater; and was to take characteristic solace that his "comparatively so incurious text" had at least not provoked Beardsley into a perverse illustration.

How little characteristic it was of him to view his problems grimly is borne out by the tone of this story, where the situation is the reverse of James' own, that of the sudden fame of a heretofore unsuccessful writer. The whole is shot through with Flaubert's refrain about "the hatred of literature," as the admiring young critic who tells the story reflects that now Neil Paraday's rare talent is "to be squeezed into his horrible age." But though the "lion" is soon exhausted and thus killed by the violence with which he is taken up by Mrs. Weeks Wimbush, the handling of the theme is on a comic plane. No one at the country house where they are so ardently discussing his new book, while he lies sick upstairs, may have read beyond its twentieth page, and his hostess may end by losing his last manuscript, but still he has had the unique privilege of being brought into the sphere of his popular contemporaries, Guy Walsingham, the lady-author of *Obsessions,* and Dora Forbes, of *The Other Way Round,* who turns out to be a man with a big red moustache.

How clearly James observed the role played by the best-selling author of his day, and how little he envied it, may be read in the winning portrait he gives of Greville Fane, another lady whose pen dipped into gold. The reason why the critic—the most frequent narrator for these stories—liked her so much is that she rested him so from literature. He marvelled at her continued success, since her books were in no relation to life, until he reflected that "It's only real success that wanes, it's only solid things that melt." What endeared her

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to him, as she traced the loves of the duchesses beside the widowed cribs of her children, was her blind devotion to them alone. The plot of the story turns around the contrast between her and her son, who grows up to pretend to be a novelist, a fake disciple of form, and, while waiting for "inspiration," sponges on her generosity. James' tender handling of her character did not prevent him from commenting on the vulgarization of taste accomplished by a lady who could contribute volumes "to the diversion of her contemporaries," but who "couldn't write a page of English." He had similar authors in mind when, in *The American Scene,* he trained his eye upon "the little tales, mostly by ladies, and about and for children romping through the ruins of the Language, in the monthly magazines."

In *The Next Time* his approach to his own situation is no longer so oblique, though the tone is still that of high comedy. Here Mrs. Highmore, "one of the most voluminous writers" of the age, yearns to be like her brother-in-law Ralph Limbert, "but of course only once, an exquisite failure." He, on the other hand, had worn out his energies in the effort to sell. After *The Major Key* never even got the publisher's money back, he tried for every popular device, but the worst he could do couldn't escape from being "a shameless merciless masterpiece" which only the critics read. It was the same to the end of his short career. Even *The Hidden Heart,* planned as an adventure story, turned out to be "but another female child." There was to be no next time for him any more than for Mrs. Highmore. As his critic friend, whose love was "the love that killed" with a popular audience, was to sum it up: "You can't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse."

The same phrase was turned by James about himself, immediately after the disastrous opening night of *Guy Domville,* in a letter to his brother William. But though he recounted the brutal shock of having been hissed and booed by the gallery after responding to the cry of "Author! Author!" he added: "Don't worry about me; I'm a Rock." Yet the problem of an audience was to bother him to the end. As he wrote in his notebook, *The Next Time* was suggested to him "really by all the little backward memories of one's frustrated ambition"; and he recalled particularly how, in his early years, he had contracted to write some Paris letters for *The New York Tribune,* and how, despite every effort, he had not been able to make them bad enough to satisfy Whitelaw Reid. *Broken Wings,* written half a dozen

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years after the rest of the group, projected the situation of two writers, a man and a woman, who each had enjoyed a following in society, only to have it fall away, and to come to the realization that nothing was to be gained by an author in the country-house world, a world which simply took all one's cleverness and had no imagination to give. James said in his preface that he failed "to disinter again the buried germ" of this story, but went on to ask, "When had I been, as a fellow scribbler, closed to the general admonition of such adventures?" And thinking perhaps also of his own moment of popularity after *Daisy Miller,* he declared that "to dissimulate the grim realities of shrunken 'custom,' the felt chill of a lower professional temperature—any old notebook would show *that* laid away as a tragic 'value'."

Where James draws most deeply on his own accumulated thoughts for these stories is in *The Middle Years,* in which the author-narrator is of the novelist's own age. Dencombe has been very sick, and picking up, in his convalescence, his book of the year before, he has a fresh impression of his work. Like James he is "a passionate corrector" of his text, and thinking how much of his life it had taken to produce so little art, what he longs for most is "Ah for another go, ah for a better chance!" It is not necessary to force a too close parallel with James' life, since his own health, very precarious earlier, had developed by middle age considerable powers of endurance. Yet his sister's death in England in 1892, the year before this story, had heightened his feeling of isolation; and it is out of isolation that Dencombe cries: "I've outlived, I've lost by the way." Dencombe comes through to a renewed faith in creative possibilities, to the reassurance that there never is exhaustion in the abundance of material, but only "in the miserable artist." But he is not to have another chance. He recognizes that he is dying, and says with the eloquence of James' own urgency: "We work in the dark—we do what we can —we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art."

The very conception of *The Figure in the Carpet* (1896) sprang from such passion. This was the story which James himself called "a significant fable"; and he said that what had stimulated him to write it was his acute impression of the Anglo-American's "so marked collective mistrust of anything like close or analytic appreciation." This story was designed as a plea for such mature criticism, as the

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prefaces were to be another. In it the ideal readers are those for whom "literature was a game of skill," since "skill meant courage, and courage meant honour, and honour meant passion, meant life." In the view of the novelist Hugh Vereker that life could be conveyed only indirectly, symbolically; his particular sense of it ran through all his books as their "exquisite scheme," "like a complex figure in a Persian carpet." James' title has given a phrase to the close textual criticism which he helped to inaugurate. Gide used it in his journal (1927) and Eliot, in introducing Wilson Knight's interpretation of Shakespeare's imaginative patterns (1930) held it up as the critic's goal. The impulse behind the phrase has quickened our awareness that the task of the critic today, after a century of historical accretion, is to see an artist's work not piece-meal but in its significant entirety, to find his compelling portrait in his works.

2.

But the question that James' contemporaries might well ask was where he found, round about him at that hour, any models on which he could plead verisimilitude for his supersubtle Neil Paradays and Ralph Limberts and Hugh Verekers. He could only answer that they had been "fathered but on his own intimate experience," that they had been "drawn preponderantly from the depths of the designer's own mind." But such an origin, he insisted, did not permit their being dismissed as unreal, since he had deliberately projected their situations as a form of what he called "operative irony," as a means of asserting that "if the life about us for the last thirty years refuses warrant for these examples, then so much the worse for that life."

If pressed further, he could have specified, as he did in his letters, how barren he found the sensibility of his milieu, in contrast with the analytic alertness of the French or of Turgenev. There was no novelist in England with whom he could share his aims. He saw quite through the pointless elaborations of his somewhat older contemporary Meredith. On finishing *Lord Ormont and His Aminta* (1894) he was moved to declare to Gosse that he doubted "if any equal quantity of extravagant verbiage, of airs and graces, of phrases and attitudes, of obscurities and alembications, ever *started* less their subject. . . ." He granted that he might be overstating the case, but he could not escape the conviction that many of Meredith's "profundities and tortuosities prove when threshed out to be only pretentious statements of

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the very simplest propositions." On the other hand, James was temperamentally at the opposite pole from Hardy, and never got closer to him than granting that *Tess* "is chock-full of faults and falsity, and yet has a singular beauty."

He continued to appreciate Howells and was in intermittent correspondence with him; but the one English practitioner of his craft with whom he felt a kinship was Stevenson, whom, unfortunately, he had come to know only a year before Stevenson left for the South Seas. But James' letters show the pitch of his admiration, which probably seems excessive to most readers now. What drew James to him was their common devotion to style. He also felt that he had at last found a reader who could understand what "an abject density and puerility" the current standards of criticism had fallen to. He was not blind to Stevenson's limitations, to his frequent mere "cleverness," to his "awfully jolly" side, but with Stevenson's departure he stated that he had "literally no one" left to share with, that he was "more and more shut up to the solitude inevitably the portion, in these islands, of him who would really try, even in so small a way as mine, to *do* it." Then, during the rehearsals of *Guy Domville,* came the news of Stevenson's death.

James was never to lose his avid curiosity in any potential incarnations of the artist, and, as late as 1914, in his essay on *The New Novel,* he was welcoming the promise of D. H. Lawrence, and, too generously, that of Hugh Walpole and Compton Mackenzie. Almost a quarter of a century before, he had been writing Stevenson that "the only news in literature" was "the infant monster of a Kipling." As though by the law of opposites James had been fascinated by the virility of his first stories, and thought that perhaps he contained "the seeds of an English Balzac." But as the years went on and James applied the demands of mature criticism, he wrote an incisive thumbnail critique to Grace Norton: "My view of his prose future has much shrunken in the light of one's increasingly observing how little of life he can make use of. . . . He has come steadily from the less simple in subject to the more simple—from the Anglo-Indians to the natives, from the natives to the Tommies, from the Tommies to the quadrupeds, from the quadrupeds to the fish, and from the fish to the engines and the screws. . . . " And the trouble with his handling of "steam and patriotism" was that it was so "mixed up with God."

Just at this time, near the close of the century, James' attention

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was attracted to a talent that he was to watch with interest for the rest of his life. No two writers could be farther apart in their aims than James and Wells, the apostle of craftsmanship and the greatest journalist of the great age of journalism. Their interchange deserves, therefore, more prominence than it has yet received as a symbolic landmark in modern critical debate. It constitutes also a kind of parable of the problems of the artist to put beside James' fictional creations and thus to add some further strokes to his self-portrait.

James' first letter is in appreciation of Wells' critical interest in *The Turn of the Screw,* and James' own statement that this story "is essentially a pot-boiler and *jeu d'esprit*" might serve as a check to our recent over-interpretation of it. What drew James to Wells was a more abundant energy than Kipling's, an ability to convey visible and audible life that he had so utterly missed in Meredith. After reading *Kipps* he declared: "You are, for me, more than ever, the most interesting 'literary man' of your generation—in fact, the only interesting one." He pronounced him in *Tono Bungay* to be "a very swagger performer" whose "vividness and colour" would have been the envy of Dickens. To be sure, James had to protest again and again, as in *The New Machiavelli,* against "that accurst autobiographic form which puts a premium on the loose, the improvised, the cheap and easy." He had known long since that their worlds were other, but, under the spell of Wells' force, he said: "I always read you . . . as I read no one else, with a complete abdication of all . . . 'principles of criticism,' canons of form, preconceptions of felicity, references to the idea of method or the sacred laws of composition." Of course, James could not do any such thing for long, and he had to comment to Mrs. Ward on the strange coexistence in Wells "of so much talent with so little art, so much life with (so to speak) so little living." This was always a basic criterion for James. But though he finally had to tell Wells that he found his persistent neglect of method to have become inexcusably "unconscious," he was still forced to add that there was no one else "who makes the whole apple-cart so run away that I don't care if I *don't* upset it and only want to stand out of its path and see it go."

But a jarring climax to their relation came in the year before James' death, when he was seventy-two and Wells forty-nine. Wells issued a facile catch-all volume, the alleged literary remains of *George Boon.* This included an amateurish parody of James and some very

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heavy-handed discussion of him. *Boon* asserts that "James has never discovered that a novel isn't a picture. . . . That life isn't a studio." He goes on to take exception to James' insistence upon composition and comes to the conclusion that his people are all "eviscerated," that his books are of an "elaborate, copious emptiness." "The only living human motives left in the novels of Henry James are a certain avidity and an entirely superficial curiosity. . . . His people nose out suspicions, hint by hint, link by link. Have you ever known living human beings do that? The thing his novel is *about* is always there. It is like a church lit but without a congregation to distract you, with every light and line focused on the high altar. And on the altar, very reverently placed, intensely there, is a dead kitten, an egg-shell, a bit of string."

James wrote at once, in profound bewilderment since, having enjoyed Wells so "enormously from far back," he had grown into "the habit of taking some common meeting-ground . . . for granted, and the falling away of this is like the collapse of a bridge which made communication possible." "But"—he went on "I am by nature more in dread of any fool's paradise, or at least of any bad misguidedness, than in love with the idea of a security proved, and the fact that a mind as brilliant as yours *can* resolve me into such an unmitigated mistake, can't enjoy me in anything like the degree in which I like to think I may be enjoyed, makes me greatly want to fix myself, for as long as my nerves will stand it, with such a pair of eyes." The defense that rose from such scrutiny rested its case squarely on "*my* measure of fullness—fullness of life and of the projection of it, which seems to you such an emptiness of both." Every sentence of this defense should be read in its slow dignified context, but since the issues were sharpened by Wells' reply, we had better turn to it.

He pointed up their fundamental divergence in attitude by saying, "To you literature like painting is an end, to me literature like architecture is a means, it has a use. Your view was, I felt, altogether too prominent in the world of criticism and I assailed it in lines of harsh antagonism. And writing that stuff about you was the first escape I had from the obsession of this war. *Boon* is just a waste-paper basket . . . I had rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it, and there was no other antagonist possible than yourself. But since it was printed I have regretted a hundred times that I did not express our profound and incurable contrast with a better grace."

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James' answer was immediate and forthright, not at all in the manner with which *Boon* had charged him, the painful manner of a hippopotamus trying to pick up a pea. "I am bound to tell you that I don't think your letter makes out any sort of case for the bad manners of *Boon,* as far as your indulgence in them at the expense of your poor old H. J. is concerned—I say 'your' simply because he has *been* yours, in the most liberal, continual, sacrificial, the most admiring and abounding critical way, ever since he began to know your writings: as to which you have had copious testimony." He took up Wells' case point by point. The comparison of a book to a waste-basket struck him "as the reverse of felicitous, for what one throws into that receptacle is exactly what one doesn't commit to publicity and make the affirmation of one's estimate of one's contemporaries by." He didn't have to elaborate his often expressed belief concerning the age's primary root of corruption: as he had remarked to Howells some years before, "The *faculty of attention* has utterly vanished from the general anglo-saxon mind, extinguished at its source by the big blatant Bayadère of Journalism." Nor did he see it anywhere evident that "my view of 'life and literature,'—or what you impute to me as such, is carrying everything before it and becoming a public menace—so unaware do I seem, on the contrary, that my products constitute an example in any measurable degree followed." The crux of the matter, however, was that he had no view of life and literature "other than that our form of the latter . . . is admirable exactly by its range and variety, its plasticity and liberality, its fairly living on the sincere and shining experience of the individual practitioner. . . . Of course for myself I live, live intensely and am fed by life, and my value, whatever it be, is in my own kind of expression of that." No passage in his prefaces had rung more eloquently of his aims.

He was not in the least taken in by Wells' specious contrast between architecture and painting. His intimate knowledge of all the plastic arts told him that "there is no sense in which architecture is aesthetically 'for use' that doesn't leave any other art whatever exactly as much so. . . . It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance . . . and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process. If I were *Boon* I should say that any pretence of such a substitute is helpless and hopeless humbug; but I wouldn't be *Boon* for the world, and am only, yours faithfully, Henry James."

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To that Wells could only reply: "I don't clearly understand your concluding phrases—which shows no doubt how completely they define our difference. When you say 'it is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance,' I can only read sense into it by assuming that you are using 'art' for every conscious human activity. I use the word for a research and attainment that is technical and special." That draws the central issue between them as sharply as possible, since the emptiness or living intricacy of the figure in James' carpet depends on whether he was using "art" as a mystical abracadabra or with verifiable comprehension of the enormous value he imputes to it.

3

Three other stories, written at widely spaced intervals, may be added to the group with which we started to give us James' answer most compactly. *The Madonna of the Future* (1873) can tell us why he saw so much value in art. *The Real Thing* (1893) is his most intimate fable of what that value consists in. *The Story In It* (1903) can demonstrate that art "makes life" only to the degree that it rises from, and, in turn, serves to heighten felt experience.

The Madonna of the Future is one of James' earliest real accomplishments, though it may seem still very "literary," with the detail of its unachieved canvas taken over from Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu,* and the speech of a Florentine painter quoted from Musset. But it puts very affectingly many of the problems of the beginning artist, and it vibrates with James' peculiarly high spiritual notes. It sprang from his own first immersion in Italian art, which had been followed by a reluctant return home. In part, therefore, the story dramatizes the special case of the American, as James had begun to feel the burden of it. The old Yankee painter, who has lived out his life in Florence, confesses sadly, and James' own anxiety is in his voice: "We're the disinherited of Art! We're condemned to be superficial! We're excluded from the magic circle! The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit! Yes, we're wedded to imperfection! An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European! We lack the deeper sense! We have neither tact nor force! How *should* we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present. . . . We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile." To which the young narrator rejoins, speaking for James' hopes: "Nothing is so idle as to talk about

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our want of a nursing air, of a kindly soil, of opportunity, of the things that help. The only thing that helps is to do something fine. There's no law in our glorious Constitution against that. Invent, create, achieve."

The intensity with which Americans like James and Poe and Eliot have cared about art has been almost a compulsive reaction against its neglect in their surroundings. It is significant, as Harry Levin has said, that whereas Balzac's story emphasizes the essential vitality of life upon which art must be based, Hawthorne's *The Artist of the Beautiful* is concerned with the spiritual ideals which sustain the artist, and James insists that such ideals may themselves be a delusion and that the only health for the artist is in the constant practice of his craft. For James, at the outset of his career, there was an even deeper dread than that voiced by the old painter. He had seen in his father's generation, which was Emerson's generation, so many artists whose master canvases remained blanks, so many transcendental geniuses without the concentration of talent. His own father was a haunting case, possessing an amazing flair for style in individual sentences but absolutely no organizing form, without which his books remained unreadable. There was a further personal pressure behind this story: here was James himself, already at the verge of thirty, and with hardly a start in fiction. Was he to be yet another of Emerson's promising young men, afraid to take the plunge? Still, as he contemplated the old painter's fatal mistake in so idealizing art that he never brought it to earth, James could envisage an even worse fate in the opposite extreme, that of cynical talent without an ideal. His particular American heritage spoke through him as he created the Italian contriver of obscene animal figurines. To this heritage James was to owe his deepest tones, the blackest threads in his design, the rare ability to suggest the horror of spiritual death. Such horror comes out in this early story with the intensity of the narrator's revulsion from this sculptor's declaration: "Cats and monkeys—monkeys and cats—all human life is there!"

The rival claims of the real and the ideal in art, and the dread that he might never find his own way of reconciling talent and genius, had long since been resolved by James when an anecdote dropped by his friend Du Maurier stimulated him to one of the lightest and yet most searching affirmations of his aesthetic theory. He produced exactly what he hoped for in his notebook recording that *The Real*

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Thing "should be a little gem of bright quick vivid form." The fable here is so resiliently designed and brings out his ideas about art through so many deft symbols that nothing short of the whole can properly convey its effect. But James' main convictions may be suggested by recalling the situation. Major Monarch and his wife, the real social thing, are desperately out of funds and want to sit for illustrations for a modern society novel. The painter-narrator is touched by their plight and reluctantly takes them on, but is immediately faced with a whole series of problems. He has a detestation of the amateur in art, and an awareness of the stultification involved in type-casting—indeed, he is very like James in his deep-rooted desire for character instead of types. Moreover, he confesses to an innate preference for appearance over reality, for "the represented subject over the real one."

Does this mean that his art is an escape, a hollow evasion of experience as Wells found James? The answer involves James' wholehearted repudiation of realism as mere literal reporting. The painter's regular model, Miss Churm, is anything but the real thing. She is a freckled cockney, but a clever actress and so a constantly shifting challenge to fresh embodiment; whereas the Major's wife, a lady certainly, "is always the same lady" and soon comes to look "singularly like a bad illustration." The show-down occurs when a little Italian model turns up with the confident belief that he can pose for an English gentleman far better than the massive Major. He soon proves that he is as good as Miss Churm, "who could look, when requested, like an Italian." His brilliant mimetic gift illustrates the necessary doctrine of imitation for any branch of art. It tells the painter again what he already knew, that action must be heightened by stylization, if art is to convey the essence and not the accidents of life. And so he is forced to turn away the Monarchs, with James' experienced and now thoroughly anti-transcendental "lesson": "that in the deceptive atmosphere of art even the highest respectability may fail of being plastic."

A kind of grace note to this discussion, concentrating directly on the art of fiction, is sounded by *The Story In It*. One of the shortest of James' compositions, it amounts to another condensed parable of his material and method. Maud Blessingbourne's fondness for French novels and D'Annunzio is in contrast with the simple absorption in life of her hostess, Mrs. Dyott. An afternoon visit is paid by Colonel

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Voyt, who,—though this has not been told to Maud,—is Mrs. Dyott's lover. The conversation centers on Maud's reading on the contrast between Anglo-Saxon fiction and the French. The Colonel holds that "they do what they feel, and they feel more things than we." Granting the superior continental maturity, Maud holds that their fiction still lacks variety, that their lovers are all the same, that, for instance, they never portray "a decent woman." The Colonel contends that you must choose, since "the subject the novelist treats is the rise, the formation, the development, the climax and for the most part the decline of a relation. . . . If a relation stops, where's the story? If it doesn't stop, where's the innocence?" If you don't choose, you're back in the floundering evasions of the English novel.

Maud doesn't argue, but she is not convinced. After the Colonel has left, she indicates why she feels so sure of her grounds. She herself is absorbed in the kind of inner drama which French fiction neglects. She is in love, but she will not say with whom; the man does not even suspect it, and she is determined, for unspoken reasons, that he should not. Mrs. Dyott tacitly guesses the truth, that Maud is in love with the Colonel, and when she next sees him, tells him so. He is astonished, but has then to grant that Maud's "consciousness, if they let it alone—as they of course after this mercifully must—*was,* in the last analysis, a kind of shy romance like their own, a thing to make the fortune of any author up to the mark—one who should have the invention or who *could* have the courage; but a small scared starved subjective satisfaction that would do her no harm and nobody else any good. Who but a duffer—he struck to his contention—would see the shadow of a 'story' in it?"

Wells and his million followers would agree with the Colonel. I have deliberately ended James' plea on one of his special cases of scruples and renunciation, for such cases are recurrent threads in his carpet. The question, however, remains whether they are too special to make a living figure. Nothing could have shocked James worse than Wells' notion that the patiently projected essence of his stories amounted to nothing more than "a bit of string." For James, unlike the aesthetes of the nineties, always insisted on the supreme importance of subject, yet insisted also that what was important could not be legislated arbitrarily but must be determined by the artist's own seasoned vision of experience, and that substance could be produced only through form.

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The split between James and Wells, between the inner and the outer world, between analytic subtlety and surface reporting, is a sign of one of the great cultural maladjustments of our age. Both James and Wells were damaged by it. The absence of critical appreciation forced James to his own extremes, to such overly ingenious effects as that in *The Figure in the Carpet* itself, where the breathless pursuit of Hugh Vereker's "meaning" ends as the kind of arid curiosity against which Wells protested. The failure of James' contemporaries to respond to Flaubert's challenge for composition compelled James to insist upon it to such lengths that he finally objected to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as "fluid puddings" because of their "defiance of economy and architecture." Though Wells did not have that tragic blindness, his increasing indifference to any art is equally unbalanced. His novels have profited less and less by any of James' advice, and in his carelessly thrown together *Autobiography* he dismissed them altogether as of no lasting worth.

The consequences of this split between "highbrow" and "lowbrow" have been especially virulent in America, fed, on the one part, by the divorce between our educated minds and experience which Santayana named the genteel tradition; and, on the other, by the enormous premiums paid to any sensationalism. Despite the fact that he was himself the extreme case of a writer glutted by slabs of raw experience which he could not assimilate, Thomas Wolfe discerned one phase of our dilemma. At one extreme are "the laboring, farming sort of people" from which Wolfe came, who think of the writer as someone romantic and remote from their own lives. At the other extreme are "the university-going kind of people, and these people also become fascinated with the glamor and difficulty of writing, but in a different way. They get more involved or fancy than the most involved and fancy European people of this sort. They become more 'Flauberty' than Flaubert. They establish little magazines that not only split a hair with the best of them, but they split more hairs than Europeans think of splitting. The Europeans say: 'Oh God, where did these people, these aesthetic Americans, ever come from?' . . . I think all of us who have tried to write in this country may have fallen in between these two groups of well-meaning and misguided people, and if we become writers finally, it is in spite of each of them."

Whitman escaped from one group, and James anticipated the other. It has been the fashion of recent criticism to dramatize the

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irreconcilable cleavage between the "lowbrows" and the "highbrows" in our literature as stemming symbolically from these two writers. But it is forgotten that James himself bridged the gap. At twenty-two, as the smartest of destructive young reviewers for the newly-launched *Nation,* he wrote his notorious apostrophe "from the intelligence to the bard" of *Drum Taps.* But in later years, as Edith Wharton has told us, he delighted in reciting Whitman's lines, "in a mood of subdued ecstasy"; and he took satisfaction too in what he called the "flat, familiar, affectionate, illiterate colloquy" of the letters to Pete Doyle. Such ripened appreciation does not in itself accomplish a reconciliation; but as Santayana observed, James in his own work overcame the genteel tradition "in the classic way, by understanding it."

The value of James' figure may be judged, as he insisted, only if it is sought out through his work as a whole. Only thus may be decided whether his scruples and renunciations are a sterile emptiness, or the guides to a peculiarly poignant suffering and inner triumph. One augury for life rather than death in his work has shone through his whole relationship with Wells. As he said, in his final letter in that interchange, it was when another "personal and intellectual history" had been determined "in the way most different" from his own that he most wanted to get at it—"precisely *for* the extension of life." It was the same with his relationship with his brother William, who from the time of *The Europeans* to *The Golden Bowl* was writing well-intentioned worried letters of uncomprehending counsel, only to have Henry reply at the end that he would "sooner descend to a dishonoured grave" than to have written such "things of the current age" as he had heard William express admiration for. "Yet," he added, "I can read *you* with rapture." We appear to have the case then that the seemingly special novelist is more outgoing in his interests than either the great journalist or the lively philosopher. Attention, perception, sympathy, are all on his side. His portrait of the artist would seem to challenge comparable qualities of our own.

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Art Chronicle

I

An Interview with Marc Chagall

ONE of the better known European painters whom the war and Nazism have driven to refuge in the United States is Marc Chagall. Chagall was born in Vitebsk, Russia, in 1887. In 1907 he took up painting. From Vitebsk he went to St. Petersburg to study there under Bakst. In 1910 he moved to Paris. Shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 he returned to Russia for a visit. He remained there until 1922 when he returned to Paris,—this time definitively, he hoped—only to be forced out of France by the Nazis in 1941.

Perhaps the most striking characteristics of Chagall's work are the persistence of certain images, apparently based on rural and religious reminiscences of his childhood, and the anecdotal illogicality with which they are arranged on his canvases. In his most recent work we still find roosters, fiddling cows, floating brides, decapitated women carrying milk-pails, rabbis clutching the Torah tight in their arms, and hall-clocks slung from giant pickled herrings, very similar to those of his Vitebsk period, twenty-five years ago. His earlier work seemed predominantly idyllic in character. But since his arrival in this country he has painted a large canvas, the *Revolution,* and a *Descent from the Cross* which have stirred up questions regarding Chagall's point of view—his political, aesthetic and religious ideologies—questions which, for the most part, have hitherto gone unanswered by the artist himself due to his reluctance to speak or to write about his work.

Chagall.—"A painter should never come between the work of art and the spectator. An intermediary may explain the artist's work without any harm to it. But the artist's explanation of it can only limit it. Better the understanding that grows from familiariy and the perspective that will come after the artist's death. After all, it is better to judge a painter by his pictures. His words, I am afraid, do nothing but veil the vision."

Sweeney.—"But your work is well known to the art-public in this country. It has enjoyed an extremely wide appeal. You are regarded as one of the leading fantastic illustrators of the present century—a reactionary from cubism and abstract art, a sympathizer with the emotional emphases of German expressionism and a forerunner of surrealism in its

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irrationality and dream-character. Thanks to the exhibition of major work such as *Moi et le Village* and *Paris par la fenêtre,* and to large retrospective exhibitions in New York, your name brings to mind at once certain images. The constant recurrence of these images had both fixed them in the public mind and whetted its curiosity. In them it sees a suggestion of nostalgia for the surroundings of your childhood, a fairy-tale atmosphere or the illustration of some folk legends of your native Vitebsk. It sees them as private symbols—using the term symbols to signify an image used as an analogy for an abstract idea,—a dove, for example, to represent peace. Your friend and admirer, Raissa Maritain, apparently also sees them in a similar light in her recent appreciation of your work. Yet the critic Florent Fels in *Propos d'artistes* once quoted you as stating very flatly: 'In my composition there is nothing of the fantastic, nor of the symbolic'."

Chagall.—"That was many years ago, 1925, still it is just as true as ever. There is nothing anecdotal in my pictures— no fairy tales—no literature in the sense of folk-legend associations. Maurice Denis described the paintings of the Synthetists in France about 1889 as plane surfaces "covered with colours arranged in a certain order." To the cubists a painting was a plane surface covered with form-elements in a certain order. For me a picture is a plane surface covered with representations of objects—beasts, birds, or humans—in a certain order in which anecdotal illustrational logic has no importance. The visual effectiveness of the painted composition comes first. Every extra-structural consideration is secondary.

"Just as before the war of 1914, I constantly had the word literature, or 'literary painting' thrown at me, now I am constantly said to be a maker of fairy-tales and of fantasies. As a matter of fact, my first aim is to construct my picture architecturally, just as in their day the impressionists did, and cubists did—along the same formal paths. The impressionists filled their canvases with spots of light and shadow. The cubists with cubic, triangular, and round shapes, I try to fill my canvases in some fashion with objects and figures employed as forms—sonorous forms like noises—passion-forms which should give a supplementary dimension impossible to achieve through the bare geometry of the cubists' lines or with the spots of the impressionists.

"I am against the terms 'fantasy' and 'symbolism' in themselves. All our interior world is reality—and that perhaps more so than our apparent world. To call everything that appears illogical, 'fantasy', fairy-tale, or chimera—would be practically to admit not understanding nature.

"Impressionism and cubism were relatively easy to understand, because they only proposed a single aspect of an object to our consideration—its relations of light and shade, or its geometrical relationships. But one aspect of an object is not enough to constitute the entire subject matter of art. An object's aspects are multifarious.

"I am not a reactionary from cubism. I have admired the great cub-

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ists and have profited from cubism. But I have argued the limitations of such a view even with my friend Apollinaire, the man who really gave cubism its place. To me cubism seemed to limit pictorial expression unduly. To persist in that I felt was to impoverish one's vocabulary. If the employment of forms not as bare of associations as those the cubists used was to produce 'literary painting,' I was ready to accept the blame for doing so. I felt painting needed a greater freedom than cubism permitted. I felt somewhat justified, later, when I saw a swing toward expressionism in Germany and still more so when I saw the birth of surrealism in the early twenties. But I have always been against the idea of schools and only an admirer of the leaders of schools. Cubism was an emphasis on one aspect only of reality—a single point of view—the architectural point of view of Picasso— and of Braque in his great years. And let me say in passing, Picasso's gray cubist pictures and his *papiers collés* are in my opinion his masterpieces.

"But please defend me against people who speak of 'anecdote' and 'fairy tales' in my work. A cow and woman to me are the same—in a picture both are merely elements of a composition. In painting, the images of a woman or of a cow have different values of plasticity,—but not different poetic values. As far as literature goes, I feel myself more 'abstract' than Mondrian or Kandinsky in my use of pictorial elements. 'Abstract' not in the sense that my painting does not recall reality. Such abstract painting in my opinion is more ornamental and decorative, and always restricted in its range. What I mean by 'abstract' is something which comes to life spontaneously through a gamut of contrasts, plastic at the same time as psychic, and pervades both the picture and the eye of the spectator with conceptions of new and unfamiliar elements. In the case of the decapitated woman with the milk pails, I was first led to separating her head from her body merely because I happened to need an empty space there. In the large cow's head in *Moi et le village* I made a small cow and woman milking visible through its muzzle because I needed that sort of form, there, for my composition. Whatever else may have grown out of these compositional arrangements is secondary.

"The fact that I made use of cows, milkmaids, roosters and provincial Russian architecture as my source forms is because they are part of the environment from which I spring and which undoubtedly left the deepest impression on my visual memory of any experiences I have known. Every painter is born somewhere. And even though he may later respond to the influences of other atmospheres, a certain essence—a certain 'aroma' of his birthplace clings to his work. But do not misunderstand me: the important thing here is not 'subject' in the sense pictorial 'subjects' were painted by the old academicians. The vital mark these early influences leave is, as it were, on the handwriting of the artist. This is clear to us in the character of the trees and card players of a Cézanne, born in France,—in the curled sinuosities of the horizons

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and figures of a Van Gogh, born in Holland,—in the almost Arab ornamentation of a Picasso, born in Spain,—or in the quattrocento linear feeling of a Modigliani, born in Italy. This is the manner in which I hope I have preserved the influences of my childhood, not merely in subject matter."

Sweeney.—"I know you have frequently stated 'art is international, but the artist ought to be national.' Nevertheless, on your return from Russia in 1922 after an eight years' sojourn there you came to the realization that your native land—the Soviet no more than Imperial Russia—had no need of you. You stated 'To them I am incomprehensible, a foreigner.' Does this mean that you regard racism as more important than nationalism and that you, as a Jew, were a foreigner even in Vitebsk?"

Chagall.—"Race? Not at all. As a native of Vitebsk I was still as close to Russia and to the soil as the day I left. But as an artist I felt myself just as much a stranger to the official, aesthetic ideology of the new government as I had been to the provincial art ideals of the Russia I left in 1910. At that time I decided I needed Paris. The root-soil of my art was Vitebsk, but like a tree, my art needed Paris like water, otherwise it would wither and die. Russia had two native traditions of art, the popular and the religious. I wanted an art of the soil, not one uniquely of the head. I had the good luck to spring from the people. But popular art—which I always love for that matter—did not satisfy me. It is too exclusive. It excludes the refinements of civilization. I have always had a pronounced taste for refined expression, for culture. The refined art of my native land was a religious art, I saw the quality of a few great productions of the ikon tradition—Rublev's work, for example. But this was fundamentally a religious art and I am not, and never have been, religious. Moreover, I felt religion meant little in the world that I knew, even as it seems to mean little today. For me Christ was a great poet, the teaching of whose poetry has been forgotten by the modern world. To achieve the combination of refined expression with an art of the earth, I felt I had to seek the vitalizing waters of Paris.

"I would like to say that my moves from country to country have always been dictated by artistic considerations. Son of a laborer, I had organically no other grounds for leaving my native land, to which I think in spite of everything I have remained loyal in my art. As painter and man of the people—and the people I consider the class of society most sensitively responsive—I felt that plastic refinement of the highest order existed only in France. Here is perhaps the source of my dualism and my climatic maladjustments through all these years. Still I would not say that I have been less able to acclimatize myself in Paris than other foreign artists.

"Neither Vitebsk nor St. Petersburg offered me what I felt I needed as a young painter setting out on his career in 1910. Similarly, after an eight-year sojourn in Russia between 1914 and 1922, I found the ideology

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of the Soviet provided no better place for my ideals of what an art expression should be. The revolution had not replaced the atmsophere which had proved so unsatisfactory to me in my early years in Russia with a more congenial one. The ideal it proposed to its artists was to become illustrators—to transport the ideology of the revolution onto the canvas. Its aim was a pictorial photography, not a poetry of forms with logic of associations relegated to a secondary level. My ideal was still a picture above all—without subject, without 'literature,' as always.

"But again do not misunderstand me: there has never been a true art but that has not been addressed solely to an elite; and equally there has never been an art truly great which has not been addressed solely to the masses. The fact is, an elite which is truly elite keeps in mind its bonds with and roots in the masses. In the past the proprietor classes possessed not only the great works of art of their period but also possessed the faculty of immediately comprehending them. The masses held themselves apart. This is one answer to the question your Dr. Coomaraswamy of the Boston Museum puts forward as a title to an essay, *Why Exhibit Works of Art?* The artist has lost his old public. The new public has not yet found the artist. While it may be contended that artists of earlier days were more fortunate in having in sight the specific function in a church house or communal building for which their work was destined, today it must be admitted that exhibitions in their real aspect serve an important end for art in educating a new public.

"The year 1922 saw me back to the well-spring in Paris. And I can freely say today that I owe all I have succeeded in achieving to Paris, to France, of which the air, the men, nature were for me the true school of my life and of my art—the waters which fed the soil in which my art had its roots. In this way I found the international language in Paris and have scrupulously striven to maintain the strength of my root soil in Vitebsk."

Sweeney.—"On your first visit to Paris Guillaume Apollinaire the poet-critic from whom the term 'surrealism' has been reputedly adopted, already pointed out a *surnaturel* character in your work; do you feel this movement an important factor in recent art development and do you feel your work has had any relation to the surrealist point of view?"

Chagall.—"Surrealism was the latest awakening of a desire to lead art out of the beaten paths of traditional expression. If it had been a little more reliable, a little more profound in its interior and exterior expression, it would have crystallized into an important movement after the example of those of the periods immediately preceding it. You ask me if I make use of the surrealist approach. I began to paint in 1907 and in my work from the beginning one can see these very surrealist elements whose character was definitely underlined in 1912 by Guillaume Apollinaire.

"Again in Russia during the First World War, far from the Salons, exhibitions and cafes of Paris, I began to ask myself: doesn't the out-

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break of such a war call for a certain auditing of accounts? The recent forms of the so-called realist schools, which for me embraced both impressionism and cubism, seemed to have lost their vitality. It was then that that characteristic which so many had treated disdainfully and lazily as 'literature' began to come to the surface.

"On my return to Paris in 1922, I was agreeably surprised to find a new artistic group of young men, the surrealists, rehabilitating to some degree that term of abuse in the period before the war, 'literary painting.' What had previously been regarded as a weakness was now encouraged. Some did go to the extreme of giving their work a frankly symbolic character, others adopted a baldly literary approach. But the regrettable part was that the art of this period offered so much less evidence of natural talent and technical mastery than the heroic period before 1914.

"As I was not yet fully acquainted with surrealist art in 1922, I had the impression of rediscovering in it what I myself had felt at once darkly and concretely between the years 1908 and 1914. But why, thought I, is it necessary to proclaim this would-be automatism? Fantastic or illogical as the construction of my pictures may seem, I would be alarmed to think I had conceived them through an admixture of automatism. If I put Death in the street and the violinist on the roof in my 1908 picture, or if, in another painting of 1911, *Moi et le Village,* I had placed a little cow with a milk-maid in the head of a big cow, I did not do it by 'automatism.'

"Even if by automatism one has succeeded in composing some good pictures or in writing some good poems, that does not justify us in setting it up as a method. Every thing in art ought to reply to every movement in our blood, to all our being, even our unconscious. But every one who has painted trees with blue shadows cannot be called an impressionist. For my part, I have slept well without Freud. I confess I have not read a single one of his books; I surely will not do it now. I am afraid that as conscious method, automatism engenders automatism. And if I am correct in feeling that the technical mastery of the 'realist period' is now on the decline, then surely the automatism of surrealism is being stripped rather naked."

JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY

II
Painters' Objects

> *The study of the beautiful is a duel in which the artist cries out in terror before he is vanquished.*—Baudelaire

We know there is something odd, we might almost say *unnatural,* about the conception of *abstract art.* . . . We have accepted its existence

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almost without reflection on how strange, and indeed frightening it is, that *l'art moderne,* in coming so far, had arrived *here.*

This disturbing sense of oddness is not confined to laymen. Braque, Miró, and Picasso have each, with surprising anger, attacked the idea of a wholly abstract art. Yet we might have expected Braque and Picasso, after their cubist discoveries, and Miró and Picasso, after their use of surrealist automatism, to evince a certain sympathy with the abstract search. But no. Picasso replies that to search means nothing in painting: "*To find is the thing.*"

Is there, then, some difference between what we have always called abstract art, and that extreme form of it, named non-objective art, which is a difference in kind, and not, as we have supposed, merely in degree? For painting plainly has always been a species of abstraction: the painter has selected from the world he knows, a world which is not entirely the same in each epoch, the forms and relations which interested him, and then employed them as he pleased. Past art has had the external world for the painter's model, however variously that world has been conceived. The art of Picasso has differed in the degree of abstraction, but not in the kind of abstraction, from the art of the Renaissance tradition of which he is the bitter *finale.*

But, in the XXth century—as a result of certain conclusions, whether valid or not, drawn from the suppressed premises of cubism—we find an extraordinary phenomenon: by many artists the external world is totally rejected as the painter's model.

More particularly, those painters who are usually named non-objective, have replaced that model with arbitrary esthetic elements of the simplest kind. These elements (and their relations) constitute a part of the external world: they in no wise image it. In this, non-objective art differs fundamentally, differs epistemologically, one might say, from other modes of art. . . .

Still, it is not easy to rid oneself of the 'objects' of the external world.

Much of the power of Mondrian's austere and naked *Compositions* derives from the "objects" of the external world, *just to the extent that we are aware that they are not present.* One of the arguments, but not the only argument by any means, which may be deduced from the non-objective painters' works, might be phrased thus: *Look! It is not difficult to abandon that dull and tedious system of describing the "objects" of the world for expressive purposes. We are too intelligent and advanced for so primitive a system. Besides, now we know all about the appearance of the world's 'objects,' the human body, the perspective of space, the manner in which light falls upon trees. To discover those things was the historical task of the Renaissance. We are much more interested in the structure of reality, or—if you object to the philosophical implication, you English-speaking people with your conventional notion that art is*

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principally a question of beauty—what interests us is the structure of painting, not the appearance of the "objects" of the external world. An empty canvas is more to the point, in being itself, an "object," and not merely an awkward image of "real objects"; and is, moreover, as Kandinsky says, "far lovelier than certain pictures." *The problem is more nearly how not to lessen the original virginal loveliness of the canvas. . . .*

From this direction the oddness of non-objective art is evident. It is an art of negation, a protest against naturalistic descriptiveness as the most adequate vehicle of expression for the modern mind. This protest has not gone unheeded. No major painter of the present is primarily descriptive in his means; and, among the interesting younger painters, none is descriptive at all, so far as we know. The occasional exceptions to this tendency occur against the painter's will, as in those passages where he has not yet found adequate non-descriptive means, or where, with other ends in view, he may still involuntarily, and by chance, seem to refer to the external world.

Indeed at present, at this very moment, when non-objective painters have made their point, we are able to feel much less strongly than earlier in the century the historical necessity of the rigid self-imposed limitations of abstract art. We are impelled instead to remark with Wallace Stevens:

Say even that this complete simplicity
Stripped one of all one's torments, concealed
The evilly compounded, vital I
And made it fresh in a world of white.
A world of clear water, brilliant-edged,
Still one would want more, one would need more,
More than a world of white and snowy scents.

*

It may be that the great Mondrian himself now feels such wants and needs. Certainly his recent painting, *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (Museum of Modern Art, New Acquisitions) represents a marked shift on his part from an intent of simple purification to one of expressiveness. . . .

Now in his old age, and in a foreign country, Mondrian has assembled all his remarkable resources for purely expressive ends. In *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* the simple elements of his hitherto analytical art have been transformed.* The former severe black bands are fractured

* The intrinsic value of this new picture cannot concern us here. Though it has been sometimes judged a near failure, we regard it as the most important work by Mondrian with which we are acquainted. The value, however, of a non-objective painting, like that of a piece of "pure" music, cannot be proven. "Proof" rests only on persuasion; and in our time we are persuaded by demonstration. But the qualitative greatness of specific sensuous relations, which constitute the content of non-objective art, *cannot be demonstrated*—as one can demonstrate, and apart from strictly formal qualities, the symbolic richness of the early Chirico,

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into segments of color so intense in contrast that they jump, so short in segment that they become a staccato rhythm against the larger rhythms of the main structure; there are heavier, and by virtue of size (since all the colors are pure) even more intense rests; and all the while the large white background, the eternal World, reinforces the concrete and fugitive drama. For the first time a subject is present, not by virtue of its absence, but actually present, though its appearance is torn away, and only the structure bared. The Modern City! Precise, rectangular, squared, whether seen from above, below, or on the side; bright lights and sterilized life; Broadway, whites and blacks; and boogie-woogie, the underground music of the at once resigned and rebellious, the betrayed . . . Mondrian has left his white paradise, and entered the world.

* *

As a result of the poverty of modern life, we are confronted with the circumstance that art is more interesting than life. *"Experience is bound to utility,"* as André Breton says, *"and guarded by common-sense."* The pleasurable "things" of other times for the most part no longer exist, and those which do no longer suffice. With what our epoch meant to replace the wonderful things of the past—the late afternoon encounters, the leisurely repasts, the discriminations of taste, the graces of manners, and the gratuitous cultivation of minds—what we might have invented, perhaps we shall never know. We have been made too busy with *tasks.*

At what other time could the juxtaposition of a bright square on a white ground have seemed so portentous!

The Surrealists alone among modern artists refused to shift the problem to the plane of art. Ideally speaking, superrealism became a system for enhancing everyday life. True, the Surrealists were always saying that "poetry should be made by all"; but they did not mean precisely what we have always meant by poetry. If they had been successful, we might not have needed "poetry" at all. Still, their various devices for finding pleasure—spiritual games, private explorations, public provocations, sensory objects, and all the rest—were *artificial* enough abroad before the war. In the hard and conventional English-speaking world the devices simply could not work. Here it was the Surrealists who were transformed. And it may be that their pioneer, and therefore often naïve effort to enhance the life of the modern mind will be forgotten.

But in any case, it is not unimportant, this thing Alexander Calder has done, in making objects of pleasure worthy of adults (Museum of Modern Art, Calder Retrospective). Granted, most of us must see them

for instance. For the layman there is no "circumstantial evidence" in non-objective art. This does not mean that value-judgments on non-objective art are arbitrary. We merely remark that they cannot be proven; and add that it is difficult to see how anyone, save certain painters, can even discriminate the content of such works, not to speak of valuing them.

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in museums or galleries, and that destroys half the fun. Still, there they are! The playthings of a prince for us all. . . .

It was Mondrian's influence which first led Calder from his earlier pleasantries, and toys for children, to these marvelous objects for the adult mind: "I was very much moved by Mondrian's studio, large, beautiful, and irregular as it was, with the walls painted white, and divided by black lines and rectangles of bright color, like his paintings . . . and I thought at the time how fine it would be if everything there MOVED; though Mondrian himself did not approve of this idea at all." Later it came to be Miró's shapes among those of abstract artists which Calder liked best. But the essential conditions of his art remained the same: a fruitful union,—his native American ingenuity (a preference for tools, rather than the brush), leading in turn to a fresh discovery (an art of motion), coupled with the advances of European art (abstract forms) and European thought (the Surrealist understanding of the desirability of the object of pleasure). The consequence of this union is that Calder's native American gifts become interesting to general culture.

There is something splendid about the form of motion, or, more exactly, motion *formed;* and it is with this that Calder has enchanted us.

* * *

Certain individuals represent a young generation's artistic chances. There are never many such individuals in a single field, such as painting —perhaps a hundred to begin with. The hazards inherent in man's many relations with reality are so great—there is disease and premature death; hunger and alcoholism and frustration; the historical moment may turn wrong for painters: it most often does; the young artist may betray himself, consciously or not, or may be betrayed—the hazards are so great that not more than five out of a whole young generation are able to develop to the end. And for the most part it is the painting of mature men which is best.

The importance of the one-man show of young Jackson Pollock (Art of This Century) lies just in this, that he represents one of the younger generation's chances. There are not three other young Americans of whom this could be said. In his exhibit Pollock reveals extraordinary gifts: his color sense is remarkably fine, never exploited beyond its proper role; and his sense of surface is equally good. His principal problem is to discover what his true *subject* is. And since painting is his thought's medium, the resolution must grow out of the process of his painting itself.

ROBERT MOTHERWELL

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Three Poems

THE SOLDIER

In the first year of the first war called the *World*
I watched a world blaze skyward into States,
And faced across the trenches of a continent
The customers whom I was shipped to kill.
Then Each taught Each to give up for the All
His joys, his reason, and his blood;
And those who had lived for profit marched to die
For all the sad varieties of Good.

All integers alike—the young and old, the poor and poor—
Were shadowed past distinction by the deaths
The States sowed over continents like salt.
Those years the flesh was levered from our bones.
The atom scratching in the gutted sty
Lost faith in that outmoded evil, good;
And learned, the rifle steady at his back,
The functions of a variable: to die.

The westering lives were steadied to a north
A little different from that sombre pole
The centuries had dreamed was Chance or Fate;
We learned—our poor wits sharpened with their blood—
That last cold center of our wish was Trade.
Where our blood ran the German books are red;
Because we died a bank in Manchester
Ships textiles to the blacks the Reich had taxed.

THE BOYG, PEER GYNT, THE ONE ONLY ONE

"Well, I have had a happy life," said Hazlitt;
Swift's eye was big as an egg.
What did the Moor say? I forget.
The servant who killed Greville cried.
They all died well: that is, they died.

How can one learn all this from Works?
It wasn't Gulliver the keeper beat;

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The informer was impressed with Marx,
Not *Capital*. On the picnics
Those Sundays, no one mentioned politics.

They lived, they died. "I am what I am,"
Someone heard Swift stammer: he was crazy.
Beethoven, dying, learned to multiply.
What does it mean? Why, nothing.
Nothing? . . . How well we all die!

SCHERZO

To sit on a chair, to eat from a table,
Is right, is polite, is comfortable—
    Or so they say;
I say so too, I suppose I know it,
If I didn't, still, I suppose I'd do it—
    It's a way.

The errors one's acquaintances call life,
The drab habitual disasters
Of paupers dropped from märchen into Europe—
The woodman frozen with both feet in air
As stiff as compasses beneath the bomber
The banker sent as succor to his winter:
I read about them sitting in my chair.

And am them; we are all corrupted.
Each year I talk more like the other fools,
Like less, lie more, am almost liked—
What does it matter? All that I love dies,
Even my wishes perish in the winter
That darkens for our time above the lands.
The snow falls on the unjust and unjust.

If I wish for a life, if I wish for my death,
In the cells where I am dying,
    Does it matter? Why care?
Does anyone care? Get up from your chair—
Is anything better? Who cares?
    It is over.

RANDALL JARRELL

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Books

THE CASE OF THE BAFFLED RADICAL

A NEW LITERATURE seems to have made its appearance—the literature of conscience of the ex-Communist.

Primarily a movement among journalists, the literary abnegation of "The Party" has already produced some outstanding novels, notably Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine* and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness At Noon.*

This literature of the Communist backslider has little in common with the epics of Party conversion known as "proletarian" writing a decade ago. The dramas of Bolshevik piety drew their main thinking, naturally, from the organization into which the initiate was delivering himself. In contrast, the work of the de-converted Red belongs to the main stream of modern writing; it is part of the tradition of doubt and negation which has occupied first place in literature for the past 100 years. Upon the Communist precepts and practices Koestler lets loose the disintegrating machinery of skepticism, ambivalence and psychiatry —weapons of the type used by Joyce in assaulting Catholic education, by Mann against the ethics of middle-class duty, or by Gide against the accepted morality of personal relations.

Measured by the accomplishment of the masters of the past generation, both the art and the skepticism of Koestler are quite thin. But as one of the best chroniclers of the moral Flight From Moscow, he brings to the novel something new or long-neglected—political sophistication and a serious sense of the human drama of public events. Koestler understands how modern man is defeated in the conference rooms and the daily press, on the battlefields and in the dungeons of Europe. He is aware of viciousness and weakness not only, as the older writers knew it, as something inherent—he knows it also as something *made,* even *made* "according to plan." . . . Perhaps the task of the artist today is rendered more difficult by the increased brutality of our culture; he is forced to deal with new problems and areas of data from which his art, as such, will gain nothing—just as the soldier at the front finds it harder to keep alive though the quality of his life is not raised by these difficulties.

Kostler's *Arrival and Departure** is the story of the education of Peter Slavek, fugitive ex-Communist, in the dubious sources of his own revolutionary heroism. Upon his arrival in "'Neutralia" (there ought to

* *By Arthur Koestler. Macmillan.* $2.

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be a law against such place-names), with which the book begins, Peter has already given up his connection with The Party, after many months in a Nazi concentration camp. Why? Because the very intensity of the sufferings he had borne without cracking had helped to convince this 22-year old son of the middle class that his resistance was due to some other source than loyalty to the Party. The rank-and-file Party members had succumbed to the tortures of the Gestapo and had betrayed their oath, and they admired this faitful Peter as a hero. But isn't there something suspicious, Peter asked himself, in being a hero?

Yet when he jumps ship at Neutralia, Peter is still a carrier of banners, determined to get back into the battle through offering himself as a volunteer to the British. While waiting, however, for the slow processes of the Consulate to lift him out of neutrality, he falls in love with a French refugee, Odette, a girl whose moral philosophy is neatly summed up by Koestler in the phrase, "After all—why not?"

The love affair, which Koestler handles rather spottily, ends abruptly when Odette leaves without warning for America. The sudden abandonment proves too much for Peter; he is smitten with a psychic paralysis of the right leg, on which the Nazi torturers have left fatal stigmata of cigar burns. The most exciting sequence in the novel is the unexpected physical collapse of Peter as the scar of the burn in the bend of his knee becomes a hole through which "the strength had run out of his leg like water out of the bath of Sonia," the female psychoanalyst in whose apartment he is staying.

The core of the book is the psychic analysis itself, during which the half-allegorical figure of Dr. Sonia Bolgar rocks in her chair by the bedside of the fallen warrior, drawing from him the tale of his deeds and his dreams. The surface layers of Peter's mental tissue contain the horrors of his actual experiences in Nazi Europe—his capture, the black-clad torturers, the "mixed transports" in which captured girls, gypsies and Jews are dragged across the continent to nightmarish fates. But when these memory fabrics are torn up by the analysis, they bring with them, like an uprooted sod, growths belonging to still deeper fears and defeats: childhood crimes, expiations and vows to which all his adult life has chained itself through symbolic transferences and confusions of identity. When the bottom is reached, and the original sin disinterred—the "accidental" putting out of his brother's eye at the age of five, which he knew subconsciously was not an accident at all—Peter is cured, "cured of his illusions, both about objective aims and subjective motives."

The new Peter decides to cast aside all political totems—"What real good had come of those quixotic crusades?" But a certain uneasiness springs up in connection with this plan too. However disillusioned he may have become, Peter is dedicated to political action, "he is not the type to back out and cultivate a garden." Below the values uprooted by psychoanalysis, judgments continue to form themselves, perhaps simply out of the need to act, characteristic of Peter and his generation.

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The final episodes of *Arrival and Departure* indicate clearly the poles of Koestler's thinking—they are the same as those that appear in the works of Thomas Mann and a good deal of other modern literature. On the one hand, the road of a relaxed yielding to events, cessation of struggle, and personal self-indulgence (identified with love): "After all —why not?" On the other, a leap in the direction of "duty," duty *felt*, not arrived at by reason and even opposed to reason: "Here we go" is the phrase Koestler uses as a key.

"Don't you think," the shot-up British flier asks Peter, "that it's rather a boring game trying to find out one's reasons for doing something?"

Thus, as Castorp in *The Magic Mountain* is last seen advancing across No Man's Land, the baffled Peter reaches action and even consciousness of possessing moral values when he leaps out over enemy country in a parachute. At the last moment, he had quitted the ship that was to take him to America and the immoral Odette—since duty is better than giving way. And he had made the final discovery that reasons are a thing of the past, for we live at the end of the age of science and "a new god is about to be born." "Here we go," trusting ourselves happily to the void in the cradle of a parachute; perhaps out of this act of self-abandonment the future deity will take shape.

Because of the intelligence, and particularly the *relevance*, of his novels, it is easier to praise Koestler than to indicate the correct proportion of his lack. His thinking tackles boldly some of the most real dramatic situations of our time. And it never forgets the personal sufferings of those who are caught in them. At the same time there is a pervading glibness in Koestler, the journalist satisfying himself with devices aimed at the reader's opinions. This glibness is not altogether a vice, since it permits the author to put down quickly and cleanly events whose meanings a more painstaking investigation might not reveal for a long time or might even find to be out of reach entirely. Haste is especially important for the chronicler of political conscience, since the background of the drama changes so rapidly today that details of doubt recorded about, say, Spain in 1935 no longer have the same point if described in 1943.

But for the readiness of his formulas, Koestler pays a high price. For instance, his handling of the psychoanalytical process is extremely well planned, but the quality of the symbols is uneven; some are subtly selected personal images, others are text-book clichés. The writing, too, is marred by easily acquired phrases and ideas: phrases like "another symbolic toy which he had hung on the Christmas tree of his guilt"; ideas like the theatrical notion of Peter that he has the duty to save mankind and that at the time of the Flood "there should have been at least one who ran back into the rain, to perish with those who had no planks under their feet."

Also, for all its philosophical fashionableness, the conclusion of *Arrival and Departure*, with its assertion of the *necessary* failure of the

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modern mind in the face of historical problems and its call for a new deity, is intellectually gross. For the book has not even raised the problem of socialism versus fascism which it pretends to exhaust. It does not criticise the particular political philosophy of Peter—he might as well have been a heroic Protestant minister. It merely argues that heroism is always the result of infantile guilt feelings, that the political always violates the personal, and that any reasoned political action involving sacrifices is therefore always wholly neurotic.

The notion that psychoanalysis gives plausibility to these conclusions is extremely superficial. The analysis is shown to have destroyed Peter's ability to make a judgment of fascism, whereas, actually, by removing his dream interpretation of the enemy, analysis should have deepened his consciousness of what fascism means. Koestler has all but left himself in the position of trying to demonstrate the contradiction that without neurotic compulsions man cannot behave intelligently.

Koestler approaches politics with a fixed philosophical dualism that distorts his understanding of the tragedy of the left intellectual of the past decade. In *Darkness at Noon,* also a novel of atonement, he did not attack the jailers of Rubashov for specific violations of socialist values, but placed the responsibility on Rubashov himself as representing with them a metaphysical absolute—"the logic of history"—opposed to the individual by the nature of things. The effect of this mechanical dichotomy (which also appears in Koestler's essays) was to cause Rubashov, introduced as one of the revolutionary founders of the USSR, to conceive his political life as nothing more than a series of crimes against the individual—it was the guilt he incurred in "representing history" that he expiated in confessing at the trial. Such a criticism of The Trials is a metaphysical not a political or historical criticism, and in effect it accepts the political and historical claims of the Communists while rejecting their moral ones.

But without concrete politics, no concrete political characters. Unlike Silone, whose fascists are living types, Koestler's novels of guilt talk about characters more often than they reveal them dramatically. The scene between Peter and Radich, Chief of the Political Department, is a marvellous dramatic opportunity—utterly missed. The same is true of Koestler's Communists; they remain invisible behind their "ideas."

No doubt the ex-Communists are baffled in the face of the present world situation. Koestler's prophecy that "a new god is about to be born" has no other content than this bafflement. The new god is a religious or mythological device which fills his hero with serene enthusiasm by ending his need to understand what is taking place. In this shape confusion is positive and homeopathic. The trouble is that it makes "Here we go" identical with "After all—why not?" and political action into a sexual experience.

HAROLD ROSENBERG

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THE TWO REPUBLICS

THE REPUBLIC. *By Charles A. Beard. Viking.* $3.00.

Professor Beard is not the first writer to give Plato the tribute of a work modeled after the wonderful dialogue which, next to the Bible, has been the most read book of the western world. There is no doubt of Professor Beard's intention: his title and subject-matter are the same, and his *Republic* is also in dialogue form, presented as the record of twenty-one informal evening seminars held, all but one of them, around the fireside at "Hosannah Hill."

However, Professor Beard has not written a Plato in modern dress. Quite the contrary, his dialogue is not a neo-*Republic* but a counter-*Republic;* he is not imitating but challenging Plato. Dr. Smyth remarks scornfully, "If we go on this way we shall soon be like the disputants in Plato's *Republic.* Scholars today cannot tell whether they were concentrating on human justice or headed all the time for a consideration of the immortality of the soul"; and Beard has himself say, " . . . I want to steer entirely clear of both Socrates and Plato. In my opinion, Greek metaphysics has done damage, not good, to the Western world and to Christian thought and practice. If modern Europeans had devoted to the study of *The Federalist* the attention they gave to Plato's *Republic,* they would have been far better off in every way."

To challenge Plato at writing dialogues is an act of some boldness. From every rhetorical phase of the contest I am afraid that Beard comes off a distant second. There is in the language of his new work little of Plato's life and wit and frequent magnificence; there is none of Plato's swift dramatic power—Beard's characters remain only mouthpieces throughout; there is almost none of the irony, none of the absorbing indirections, and nothing to put beside the great myths of Plato's 7th and 10th books or the richly scattered lesser myths and metaphors. But I am sure that Professor Beard has not meant to compete with Plato in rhetoric. It is Plato's ideas, and, even more, his method, that he is opposing. In Beard's implicit estimate, Plato wrote dogmatically, from the point of view of a dualistic metaphysics that dictated a utopian analytic treatment of the problems of politics and morality. Plato constructed an ideal state out of metaphysically acceptable concepts, and had Socrates declare irrelevant the question whether such a state is possible in practice. Not until the picture of the ideal state was fully drawn did he return to possibility.

Beard wishes to reject the dogmatic, the utopian and the metaphysical, taking as his point of reference not an ideal Form but the actual United States and its history. The constitution of his state is the actual Constitution of this nation (the full text is included). Many questions are left unanswered, many conflicting points of view deliberately unresolved. He often repeats that his appeal is to empirical method, to the records and lessons of historical experience. The words of the Constitution

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about separation of powers are not allowed to stand against the fact that the legislative, executive and judicial powers are not clearly separated; practice, not words, shows who votes, who rules, what liberties citizens possess. "The hard-headed framers of our Constitution were not as ingenious in speculation and in finespun definitions of ideas as Socrates and his companions. . . . They refused to try by ideal standards the fruits of necessity and the frailties of human beings. They sought to institute a workable government and a workable society."

The general subject is announced in an introduction: "Suppose then we set down or fix as our center of concern the Republic, our Republic, as strengthened, developed, and governed under the Constitution of the United States." The chief theme, however—and this is proving a surprise to readers who remember how close to economic determinism many of Beard's past writings have been—is an interpretation and defense of "constitutionalism": "in my judgment, no other theme of national policy is so important for us as constitutionalism—the civilian way of living together in the Republic, the way of preserving our liberties and the decencies of social intercourse against the frenzies of the despotic and violent temper. How to preserve the idea of constitutional processes . . . that is the task of the present and future, a task of civilization, supreme over all others."

Around this subject and this theme the discussions of the seminars are arranged: a series of calm, informative, wise reflections on the nature and history of government, particularly of the government of this country. The defense of constitutionalism, naturally, leads to modifications and even reversals of Beard's earlier judgments. The economic factor diminishes in importance; he now defends Hamilton and, on the whole, the Supreme Court; and, in a direct reversal, takes the side of Lincoln against the radical Republicans.

Many of the discussions are illuminating in detail, but the impression of the whole is unsatisfying. The truth is that Beard has not got so far away from Plato as he insists, that Plato is less purely metaphysical and Beard less entirely empirical than he would seem to believe. Plato's republic is not, really, a mere ideal Form but rather an idealization of ancient Sparta, which Plato half knew and half imagined, in contrast to his own defeated and corrupt city. Beard's republic and his constitution are not, really, this actual nation and its actual Constitution but, in part at least, an idealized version of this nation's past—not its present and future—and of an eternal, most Platonic Form of constitutionalism.

"The principle of constitutionalism, composed of these four essential elements, is in eternal contradiction to the principle of authoritarian, totalitarian, dictatorial government. . . . That principle is a permanent principle even though constitutions as documents may be scrapped or burned, and the principle of tyranny, however phrased, set up in its place. The principle of constitutional government will always exist, we may assume, as an idea or ideal, to be contrasted with the authoritarian

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principle of despotism." For such leaps into an empirical void, the language itself becomes straight Platonic-Hegelian.

The reason, I think, is that constitutionalism, empirically interpreted in terms of the actual Constitution of this country, does not provide an answer to the empirical problems of the present and future; therefore Professor Beard also must escape to the World of Being. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that nowhere in the dialogue does Beard treat plainly the two central developments of the present: the growth of the unlimited bureaucractic state; and the bid of the United States for world domination. Surely the first of these is the great threat to constitutional government such as Professor Beard is defending, and is not to be answered by a mere optimistic reminder that our form of government has in the past proved flexible enough to meet new problems as they arise. Nor, in the case of the second, is it enough, at the very time when the United States is plunged into the mainstream of world politics, to linger on an American exceptionalism that was the temporary product of local circumstance.—"I believe that there will always be an America, an America with unique characteristics. . . . America is fated to be America, and all the pulling and hauling of world-planners cannot alter that fact."

There is a revealing dramatic symbol of Beard's unwillingness to meet the problem of the United States' now irrevocable enmeshment in world politics. I have already noted that, of the twenty-one "seminars" that compose the dialogue, all but one are presented as if held at Beard's own house. That one, where he leaves his fireside—for a satirized cocktail party crowded with straw-built "world planners"—is entitled, "The Republic in the World of Nations," and in this short episode alone, and in only part of this, are the world political problems seriously dealt with.

Sorel once showed how all utopias, though ostensibly projects for the future, are invariably sighs for the past. In spite of its knowledge, its integrity, good will and intelligence, this new *Republic,* like its original, is finally utopian.

JAMES BURNHAM

GANDHI IN MAYFAIR

BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR. *By Lionel Fielden. Secker and Warburg,* 3s. 6d.

If you compare commercial advertising with political propaganda, one thing that strikes you is its relative intellectual honesty. The advertiser at least knows what he is aiming at—that is, money—whereas the propagandist, when he is not a lifeless hack, is often a neurotic working off some private grudge and actually desirous of the exact opposite of the thing he advocates. The ostensible purpose of Mr. Fielden's book is to further the cause of Indian independence. It will not have that effect,

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and I do not see much reason for thinking that he himself wishes for anything of the kind. For if someone is genuinely working for Indian independence, what is he likely to do? Obviously he will start by deciding what forces are potentially on his side, and then, as cold-bloodedly as any toothpaste advertiser, he will think out the best method of appealing to them. This is not Mr. Fielden's manner of approach. A number of motives are discernible in his book, but the immediately obvious one is a desire to work off various quarrels with the Indian Government, All-India Radio and various sections of the British Press. He does indeed marshal a number of facts about India, and towards the end he even produces a couple of pages of constructive suggestions, but for the most part his book is simply a nagging, irrelevant attack on British rule, mixed up with tourist-like gush about the superiority of Indian civilization. On the fly-leaf, just to induce that matey atmosphere which all propagandists aim at, he signs his dedicatory letter 'among the European barbarians', and then a few pages later introduces an imaginary Indian who denounces Western civilization with all the shrillness of a spinster of thirty-nine denouncing the male sex:

'. . . an Indian who is intensely proud of his own traditions, and regards Europeans as barbarians who are continually fighting, who use force to dominate other peaceful peoples, who think chiefly in terms of big business, whisky, and bridge; as people of comparatively recent growth, who, while they put an exaggerated value on plumbing, have managed to spread tuberculosis and venereal disease all over the world . . . he will say that to sit in the water in which you have washed, instead of bathing yourself in running water, is not clean, but dirty and disgusting; he will show, and I shall agree with him absolutely, that the English are a dirty and even a smelly nation compared with the Indians; he will assert, and I am not at all sure that he is wrong, that the use of half-washed forks, spoons and knives by different people for food is revoltingly barbaric when compared with the exquisite manipulation of food by Indian fingers; he will be confident that the Indian room, with its bare walls and beautiful carpets, is infinitely superior to the European clutter of uncomfortable chairs and tables,' etc. etc. etc.

The whole book is written in this vein, more or less. The same nagging, hysterical note crops up every few pages, and where a comparison can be dragged in it is dragged in, the upshot always being that the East is Good and the West is Bad. Now before stopping to inquire what service this kind of thing really does to the cause of Indian freedom, it is worth trying an experiment. Let me rewrite this passage as it might be uttered by an Englishman speaking up for his own civilization as shrilly as Mr. Fielden's Indian. It is important to notice that what he says is not more dishonest or more irrelevant than what I have quoted above:

' . . . an Englishman who is intensely proud of his own traditions, and regards Indians as an unmanly race who gesticulate like monkeys, are

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cruel to women and talk incessantly about money; as a people who take it upon themselves to despise Western science and hence are rotten with malaria and hookworm . . . he will say that in a hot climate washing in running water has its points, but that in cold climates all Orientals either wash as we do or as in the case of many Indian hill tribes—not at all; he will show, and I shall agree with him absolutely, that no Western European can walk through an Indian village without wishing that his smell organs had been removed beforehand; he will assert, and I am not at all sure that he is wrong, that eating with your fingers is a barbarous habit since it cannot be done without making disgusting noises; he will be confident that the English room, with its comfortable armchairs and friendly bookshelves, is infinitely superior to the bare Indian interior where the mere effort of sitting with no support to your back makes for vacuity of mind,' etc. etc. etc.

Two points emerge here. To begin with, no English person would now write like that. No doubt many people think such thoughts, and even utter them behind closed doors, but to find anything of the kind in print you would have to go back ten years or so. Secondly, it is worth asking, what would be the effect of this passage on an Indian who happened to take it seriously? He would be offended, and very rightly. Well then, isn't it just possible that passages like the one I quoted from Mr. Fielden might have the same effect on a British reader? No one likes hearing his own habits and customs abused. This is not a trivial consideration, because at this moment books about India have, or could have, a special importance. There is no political solution in sight, the Indians cannot win their freedom and the British Government will not give it, and all one can for the moment do is to push public opinion in this country and America in the right direction. But that will not be done by any propaganda that is merely anti-European. A year ago, soon after the Cripps mission had failed, I saw a well-known Indian nationalist address a small meeting at which he was to explain why the Cripps offer had been refused. It was a valuable opportunity, because there were present a number of American newspaper correspondents who, if handled tactfully, might cable to America a sympathetic account of the Congress Party's case. They had come there with fairly open minds. Within about ten minutes the Indian had converted all of them into ardent supporters of the British Government, because instead of sticking to his subject he launched into an anti-British tirade quite obviously founded on spite and inferiority complex. That is just the mistake that a toothpaste advertiser would not make. But then the toothpaste advertiser is trying to sell toothpaste and not to get his own back on that Blimp who turned him out of a first-class carriage fifteen years ago.

However, Mr. Fielden's book raises wider issues than the immediate political problem. He upholds the East against the West on the ground that the East is religious, artistic and indifferent to 'progress,' while the West is materialistic, scientific, vulgar and warlike. The great crime of

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Britain is to have forced industrialization on India. (Actually, the real crime of Britain during the last thirty years has been to do the opposite.) The West looks on work as an end in itself, but at the same time is obsessed with a 'high standard of living' (it is worth noticing that Mr. Fielden is anti-Socialist, Russophobe and somewhat contemptuous of the English working class), while India wants only to live in ancestral simplicity in a world freed from the machine. India must be independent, and at the same time must be de-industrialized. It is also suggested a number of times, though not in very clear terms, that India ought to be neutral in the present war. Needless to say, Mr. Fielden's hero is Gandhi, about whose financial background he says nothing. 'I have a notion that the legend of Gandhi may yet be a flaming inspiration to the millions of the East, and perhaps to those of the West. But it is, for the time being, the East which provides the fruitful soil, because the East has not yet fallen prone before the Golden Calf. And it may be for the East, once again, to show mankind that human happiness does not depend on that particular form of worship, and that the conquest of materialism is also the conquest of war.' Gandhi makes many appearances in the book, playing rather the same part as 'Frank' in the literature of the Buchmanites.

Now, I do not know whether or not Gandhi will be a 'flaming inspiration' in years to come. When one thinks of the creatures who *are* venerated by humanity it does not seem particularly unlike. But the statement that India 'ought' to be independent, *and* de-industrialized, *and* neutral in the present war, is an absurdity. If one forgets the details of the political struggle and looks at the strategic realities, one sees two facts which are in seeming conflict. The first is that whatever the 'ought' of the question may be, India is very unlikely ever to be independent in the sense in which Britain or Germany is now independent. The second is that India's *desire* for independence is a reality and cannot be talked out of existence.

In a world in which national sovereignty exists, India cannot be a sovereign State, because she is unable to defend herself. And the more she is the cow and spinning-wheel paradise imagined by Mr. Fielden, the more this is true. What is now called indepedence means the power to manufacture aeroplanes in large numbers. Already there are only five genuinely independent States in the world, and if present trends continue there will in the end be only three. On a long-term view it is clear that India has little chance in a world of power politics, while on a short-term view it is clear that the necessary first step towards Indian freedom is an Allied victory. Even that would only be a short and uncertain step, but the alternatives must lead to India's continued subjection. If we are defeated, Japan or Germany takes over India and that is the end of the story. If there is a compromise peace (Mr. Fielden seems to hint at times that this is desirable) India's chances are no better, because in such circumstances we should inevitably cling to any territories we had cap-

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tured or not lost. A compromise peace is always a peace of 'grab what you can.' Mr. Fielden brings forward his imaginary Indian to suggest that if India were neutral Japan might leave her alone; I doubt whether any responsible Indian nationalist has said anything quite so stupid as that. The other idea, more popular in Left-wing circles, that India could defend herself better on her own than with our help, is a sentimentality. If the Indians were militarily superior to ourselves they would have driven us out long ago. The much-quoted example of China is very misleading here. India is a far easier country to conquer than China, if only because of its better communications, and in any case Chinese resistance depends on help from the highly-industrialized states and would collapse without it. One must conclude that for the next few years India's destiny is linked with that of Britain and the U.S.A. It might be different if the Russians could get their hands free in the West or if China were a great military power; but that again implies a complete defeat of the Axis, and points away from the neutrality which Mr. Fielden seems to think desirable. The idea put forward by Gandhi himself, that if the Japanese came they could be dealt with by sabotage and 'non-co-operation,' is a delusion, nor does Gandhi show any very strong signs of believing in it. Those methods have never seriously embarrassed the British and would make no impression on the Japanese. After all, where is the Korean Gandhi?

But against this is the *fact* of Indian nationalism, which is not to be exorcised by the humbug of White Papers or by a few phrases out of Marx. And it is nationalism of an emotional, romantic, even chauvinistic kind. Phrases like 'the sacred soil of the Motherland,' which now seem merely ludicrous in Britain, come naturally enough to an Indian intellectual. When the Japanese appeared to be on the point of invading India, Nehru actually used the phrase 'Who dies if India live?' So the wheel comes full circle and the Indian rebel quotes Kipling. And nationalism at this level works indirectly in favour of Fascism. Extremely few Indians are at all attracted by the idea of a federated world, the only kind of world in which India could actually be free. Even those who pay lip-service to federalism usually want only an Eastern federation, thought of as a military alliance against the West. The idea of the class struggle has little appeal anywhere in Asia, nor do Russia and China evoke much loyalty in India. As for the Nazi domination of Europe, only a handful of Indians are able to see that it affects their own destiny in any way. In some of the smaller Asiatic countries the 'my country right or wrong' nationalists were exactly the ones who went over to the Japanese—a step which may not have been wholly due to ignorance.

But here there arises a point which Mr. Fielden hardly touches on, and that is: we don't know to what extent Asiatic nationalism is simply the product of our own oppression. For a century all the major Oriental nations except Japan have been more or less in subjection, and the hysteria and shortsightedness of the various nationalist movements may

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be the result simply of that. To realize that national sovereignty is the enemy of national freedom may be a great deal easier when you are not being ruled by foreigners. It is not certain that this is so, since the most nationalist of the Oriental nations, Japan, is also the one that has never been conquered, but at least one can say that if the solution is not along these lines, then there *is* no solution. Either power politics must yield to common decency, or the world must go spiralling down into a nightmare of which we can already catch some dim glimpses. And the necessary first step, before we can make our talk about world federation sound even credible, is that Britain shall get off India's back. This is the only large-scale decent action that is possible in the world at this moment. The immediate preliminaries would be: abolish the Viceroyalty and the Indian Office, release the Congress prisoners, and declare India formally independent. The rest is detail.*

But how are we to bring any such thing about? If it is done at this time, it can only be a voluntary act. Indian independence has no asset except public opinion in Britain and America, which is only a potential asset. Japan, Germany and the British Government are all on the other side, and India's possible friends, China and the U.S.S.R., are fighting for their lives and have little bargaining power. There remain the peoples of Britain and America, who are in a position to put pressure on their own Governments if they see a reason for doing so. At the time of the Cripps mission, for instance, it would have been quite easy for public opinion in this country to force the Government into making a proper offer, and similar opportunities may recur. Mr. Fielden, by the way, does his best to throw doubt on Cripps' personal honesty, and also lets it appear that the Congress Working Committee were unanimously against accepting the Cripps proposals, which was not the case. In fact, Cripps extorted the best terms he could get from the Government; to get better ones he would have had to have public opinion actively and intelligently behind him. Therefore the first job is—win over the ordinary people of this country. Make them see that India matters, and that India has been shamefully treated and deserves restitution. But you are not going to do that by insulting them. Indians, on the whole, grasp this better than their English apologists. After all, what is the probable effect of a book which irrelevantly abuses every English institution, rapturises over the 'wisdom of the East' like an American schoolmarm on a conducted tour, and mixes up pleas for Indian freedom with pleas for surrender to Hitler? At best it can only convert the converted, and it may de-convert a few of those. The net effect must be to strengthen British imperialism, though its motives are probably more complex than this may seem to imply.

On the surface, Mr. Fielden's book is primarily a plea for 'spiritu-

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* Of course the necessary corollary would be a military alliance for the duration of the war. But it is not likely that there would be any difficulty in securing this. Extremely few Indians really want to be ruled by Japan or Germany.

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ality' as against 'materialism.' On the one hand an uncritical reverence for everything Oriental; on the other a hatred of the West generally, and of Britain in particular, hatred of science and the machine, suspicion of Russia, contempt for the working-class conception of Socialism. The whole adds up to Parlour Anarchism—a plea for the simple life, based on dividends. Rejection of the machine is, of course, always founded on tacit acceptance of the machine, a fact symbolised by Gandhi as he plays with his spinning-wheel in the mansion of some cotton millionaire. But Gandhi also comes into the picture in another way. It is noticeable that both Gandhi and Mr. Fielden have an exceedingly equivocal attitude towards the present war. Although variously credited in this country with being a 'pure' pacifist and a Japanese agent, Gandhi has, in fact, made so many conflicting pronouncements on the war that it is difficult to keep track of them. At one moment his 'moral support' is with the Allies, at another it is withdrawn, at one moment he thinks it best to come to terms with the Japanese, at another he wishes to oppose them by non-violent means—at the cost, he thinks, of several million lives—at another he urges Britain to give battle in the west and leave India to be invaded, at another he 'has no wish to harm the Allied cause' and declares that he does not want the Allied troops to leave India. Mr. Fielden's views on the war are less complicated, but equally ambiguous. In no place does he state whether or not he wishes the Axis to be defeated. Over and over again he urges that an Allied victory can lead to no possible good result, but at the same time he disclaims 'defeatism' and even argues that Indian neutrality would be useful to us in a *military* sense, i.e. that we could fight better if India were not a liability. Now, if this means anything, it means that he wants a compromise, a negotiated peace; and though he fails to say so, I do not doubt that that is what he does want. But curiously enough, this is the *imperialist* solution. The appeasers have always wanted neither defeat nor victory but a compromise with the other imperialist powers; and they too have known how to use the manifest folly of war as an argument.

For years past the more intelligent imperialists have been in favour of compromising with the Fascists, even if they had to give away a good deal in order to do so, because they have seen that only thus could imperialism be salvaged. Some of them are not afraid to hint this fairly broadly even now. If we carry the war to a destructive conclusion, the British Empire will either be lost, or democratised, or pawned to America. On the other hand it could and probably would survive in something like its present form if there were other sated imperialist powers which had an interest in preserving the existing world system. If we came to an understanding with Germany and Japan we might diminish our possessions (even that isn't certain: it is a little-noticed fact that *in territory* Britain and the U.S.A. have gained more than they have lost in this war), but we should at least be confirmed in what we had already. The world would be split up between three or four great imperial powers

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who, for the time being, would have no motive for quarrelling. Germany would be there to neutralize Russia, Japan would be there to prevent the development of China. Given such a world system, India could be kept in subjection almost indefinitely. And more than this, it is doubtful whether a compromise peace *could* follow any other lines. So it would seem that Parlour Anarchism is something very innocuous after all. Objectively it only demands what the worst of the appeasers want, subjectively it is of a kind to irritate the possible friends of India in this country. And does not this bear a sort of resemblance to the career of Gandhi, who has alienated the British public by his extremism and aided the British Government by his moderation? Impossibilism and reaction are usually in alliance, though not, of course, conscious alliance.

Hypocrisy is a very rare thing, true villainy is perhaps difficult as virtue. We live in a lunatic world in which opposites are constantly changing into one another, in which pacifists find themselves worshipping Hitler, Socialists become nationalists, patriots become quislings, Buddhists pray for the success of the Japanese army, and the Stock Market takes an upward turn when the Russians stage an offensive. But though these people's motives are often obvious enough when seen from the outside, they are not obvious to themselves. The scenes imagined by Marxists, in which wicked rich men sit in little secret rooms and hatch schemes for robbing the workers, don't happen in real life. The robbery takes place, but it is committed by sleepwalkers. Now, one of the finest weapons that the rich have ever evolved for use against the poor is 'spirituality.' If you can induce the working-man to believe that his desire for a decent standard of living it 'materialism,' you have got him where you want him. Also, if you can induce the Indian to remain 'spiritual' instead of taking up with vulgar things like trade unions, you can ensure that he will always remain a coolie. Mr. Fielden is indignant with the 'materialism' of the Western working class, whom he accuses of being even worse in this respect than the rich and of wanting not only radios but even motor-cars and fur coats. The obvious answer is that these sentiments don't come well from someone who is in a comfortable and privileged position himself. But that is only an answer, not a diagnosis, for the problem of the disaffected intelligentsia would be hardly a problem at all if ordinary dishonesty were involved.

In the last twenty years Western civilization has given the intellectual security without responsibility, and in England, in particular, it has educated him in scepticism while anchoring him almost immovably in the privileged class. He has been in the position of a young man living on an allowance from a father whom he hates. The result is a deep feeling of guilt and resentment, not combined with any genuine desire to escape. But some psychological escape, some form of self-justification there must be, and one of the most satisfactory is transferred nationalism. During the nineteen-thirties the normal transference was to Soviet Russia, but there are other alternatives, and it is noticeable that pacifism and An-

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archism, rather than Stalinism, are now gaining ground among the young. These creeds have the advantage that they aim at the impossible and therefore in effect demand very little. If you throw in a touch of Oriental mysticism and Buchmanite raptures over Gandhi, you have everything that a disaffected intellectual needs. The life of an English gentleman and the moral attitude of a saint can be enjoyed simultaneously. By merely transferring your allegiance from England to India (it used to be Russia), you can indulge to the full in all the chauvinistic sentiments which would be totally impossible if you recognized them for what they were. In the name of pacifism you can compromise with Hitler, and in the name of 'spirituality' you can keep your money. It is no accident that those who wish for an inconclusive ending to the war tend to extol the East as against the West. The actual facts don't matter very much. The fact that the Eastern nations have shown themselves at least as warlike and bloodthirsty as the Western ones, that so far from rejecting industrialism, the East is adopting it as swiftly as it can—this is irrelevant, since what is wanted is the mythos of the peaceful, religious and patriarchal East to set against the greedy and materialistic West. As soon as you have 'rejected' industrialism, and hence Socialism, you are in that strange no man's land where the Fascist and the pacifist join forces. There is indeed a sort of apocalyptic truth in the statement of the German radio that the teachings of Hitler and Gandhi are the same. One realizes this when one sees Middleton Murry praising the Japanese invasion of China and Gerald Heard proposing to institute the Hindu caste system in Europe at the same time as the Hindus themselves are abandoning it. We shall be hearing a lot about the superiority of Eastern civilization in the next few years. Meanwhile this is a michievous book, which will be acclaimed in the Left-wing Press and welcomed for quite different reasons by the more intelligent Right.

GEORGE ORWELL

EMPTY NET

THE WIDE NET AND OTHER STORIES. *By Eudora Welty. Harcourt, Brace.* $2.50.

The stories in Miss Welty's first volume, *The Curtain of Green,* were not consciously profound, but implicit in them was an astute commentary on human behaviour. The agencies for her implications were humor, a contrived but clever architecture, taste, and arresting, if occasionally deformed, prose. But in her new book, *The Wide Net,* the author, warily picking her way through meanings and the amorphous produce of the soul, or rocketing out of sight in a burst of fantasy, loses her humor, leaves fissures in her masonry, forgets her breeding, and writes eight stories in a language so vague that not only actual words but syntax itself have the improbable inexactitude of a verbal dream. Nor is the landscape any more precise, nor have the characters more

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than the most general physiognomy, the most uniform speech and attitudes and meditations.

Perhaps most unsuccessful are the two stories of a historical flavor. I say "flavor" but I could say "odor" or "echo" or "tinge," for the past is no more substantial than these. In "First Love," Aaron Burr figures as a troubled, debonair shape in a black cloak, but there are no facts to convince one that this is really Aaron Burr and not another man of the same name with no discernible characteristics to distinguish him from the table at which he sits. Similarly, in "A Still Moment," Audubon accomplishes nothing to authenticate his identity but is only a *deus ex machina* who, almost by accident, is a naturalist.

"The Purple Hat," a tale of a New Orleans gambling house and told by a plump man in a bar, cannot be assigned an accurate adjective. One has no idea why it was written. Like its focal point, the purple hat, the story is an inexplicable assembly of doo-dads. I am not convinced by the title story in which the dialogue is so cadenced it is hard not to keep time with one's foot. And I am as languid as calmed down Ol' Man River when, in "At the Landing," I have lived through death and a flood and a seduction and the subsequent collapse of her social position with a southern belle. "Livvie," recording the life of a young negro woman married to a comatose but intermittently frightening old man, is frequently charming and reminiscent of the earlier stories, for the protagonist here is not rummaging through her emotions, but, with a clear and immediate objectivity sees *things* like the crape myrtle trees whose branches end in colored bottles to keep evil spirits away. "The Winds" offers the summertime reflections of a little girl of sensibility and warmth, and if it were not for the language out of whose smothering density her thoughts must struggle and often fail to rise, she would, I think, be the heroine of an artful story. But she, unlike Livvie, cannot observe for she looks through a haze which distorts while it beautifies the world.

And even in "Asphodel," a story potentially as wry as "Old Mr. Grenada" or "Clytie," Miss Welty does not completely satisfy. Here is her familiar material: prim, evil-minded spinsters recounting with lust and horror the antics of a philanderer and the sufferings of his wife. As in the other stories, there is wanting the confidence and directness promised in the opening paragraphs, then deflected, finally dissipated. One can only hope that the talent which executed "The Petrified Man" and "Why I Live at the P.O." will awaken from this stumbling sleep.

JEAN STAFFORD

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Variety

Mr. Joseph E. Davies as a Master of Prose

I have just been reading *Mission to Moscow,* Mr. Joseph E. Davies' book, after seeing the film of the same title. The picture, I find, coincides with the book in almost no respect. The real Mr. Joseph Davies, for example, is a shrewd corporation lawyer who contributed to the Roosevelt campaign fund and was appropriately rewarded with an ambassadorship. The Davies of the Warner Brothers picture is a plain rugged American business man, played by Mr. Walter Huston rather like a more elderly version of Sinclair Lewis' Dodsworth, who demurs with a touching humility when the President asks him to go to Russia, and protests that he is really not qualified because he has had no diplomatic training. The real Mr. Davies was sent specifically to talk about a trade agreement and to arrange for the settlement of debts contracted by the Kerensky government. The Hollywood Mr. Davies is simply entrusted with a solemn mission of reporting on the state of the Soviet Union. The real Mr. Davies was troubled by the tyrannies of the Stalinist police state. "No physical betterment of living standards," he wrote, "could possibly compensate for the utter destruction of liberty of thought or speech, and the sanctity of the individual. . . . The government is a dictatorship not 'of the proletariat,' as professed, but 'over the proletariat.' It is completely dominated by one man." One could go on like this at length.

There is one point, however, in which the picture is quite faithful to the real Mr. Davies. When the Davies of Walter Huston is made to attend the Moscow trials, he enunciates the following statement: "Based on twenty years of trial practice, I'd be inclined to believe these men's testimony." The trials themselves, it is true, are represented falsely, and this is not precisely the kind of thing that Mr. Davies was saying about them at the time; but the undependable syntax of the Warner Brothers' Davies is absolutely true to life. I should say, indeed, from reading the book, that the author of *Mission to Moscow* is, so far as my experience goes, the greatest master of bad official English since the late President Harding.

The prose style of President Harding has been analyzed by H. L. Mencken in his admirable little paper, "A Short View of Gamalielese"; and this piece, which I have lately been reading, has stimulated me to try to do some justice to the beauties of the writing of Davies.

Let me begin with one of the cultural notes with which Davies the connoisseur and man of taste diversifies his record of affairs of state, a passage which illustrates brilliantly his skill in producing the effect of surprise:

For weeks there have been celebrations of the centenary of

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Pushkin's death all over the country. He is a combination of Byron and Shakespeare for the Russian people. He was a liberal in thought and married to a noblewoman who, it is alleged, was a mistress of the tsar. He was killed in a duel, which, as the story goes, was a frame-up. Both the opera and the ballet were based on Pushkin's works and the music was by the great Tchaikovsky. The opera was "Eugen Onegin," a romantic story of two young men of position whose friendship was broken up over a misunderstanding and lovers' quarrel which resulted in a duel in which the poet was killed. It was significant of Pushkin's own end and oddly enough was written by him.

The sequence of relative pronouns here in the sentence before the last, each one depending on the one before, is a very fine bit of writing, but it only prepares for the climax. It drags us by a series of hitches up an incline like the hump on a roller-coaster, from the top of which we suddenly dip into a dizzying and breath-depriving excitement. What is it that makes the next sentence so startling? Not syntax, for the syntax is normal. Not logic: no mere fallacy is involved. We cannot assign the manoeuvre to any of the familiar categories of rhetorical or logical errors. The device is original and daring; it takes us a moment to grasp it; but then we become aware that the trick consists of first explaining that the opera which Mr. Davies calls *Eugen Onegin* (though this is neither its Russian nor its English form) is based on Pushkin's poem; then of indicating a striking parallel between the circumstances of Pushkin's death and the poem; and then of suddenly making the point that, by some scarcely believable coincidence, the poem was written by Pushkin. But to paraphrase the passage thus is to rob it of all its thrill. The whole effect depends on the quickness of the shift in the sense and on the simple phrase, oddly enough at once arresting and casual. Only a bad writer of genius could have hit upon and placed this phrase. It is as if a long red carpet on which we had been walking on our way to some ceremony of state had suddenly been pulled out from under us.

Yet there is at least one example even bolder of Mr. Davies' ability to baffle and to dazzle:

> *The peace of Europe, if maintained, is in imminent danger of being a peace imposed by the dictators, under conditions where all of the smaller countries will speedily rush in to get under the shield of the German aegis, and under conditions where, even though there be a concert of power, as I have predicted to you two years ago, with "Hitler leading the band."*

Here the opening is weighty and portentous: a veteran man of affairs with a large experience of Europe is about to deliver a considered opinion. The first indication of anything queer comes with *the shield of the German aegis;* but although this gives us pause for a moment, we immediately re-

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assure ourselves by concluding that Mr. Davies surely knows that a shield *is* an aegis, and has allowed himself the little tautology, in the exuberance of his enjoyment of his official position, as a mere rhetorical flourish. But then we come to the *as I have predicted to you two years ago.* The tense here is incorrect: it should be *as I predicted to you two years ago.* We conclude that Mr. Davies does not know this, but that, even though he does not know it, the instinct of his genius has guided him to hit upon the perfect deviation which, by adding to the solemnity of the tone at the same time as to the absurdity of the writing, will lead the way to the final effect. And what an effect it is! The sentence never comes to a conclusion. It is a new sort of aposiopesis—an aposiopesis with a full-stop at the end. Yet the grammatical impossibility has with wonderful art been half-concealed. He has first given us one adverbial clause beginning with *under conditions where,* which completes itself in the logical way, and he now starts another clause like it: *and under conditions where.* Having just seen the preceding one brought off, the mind is prepared to supply the necessary fulfilment of the second. But this second clause is never completed. Mr. Davies, by a rare stroke of art, starts another subordinate clause, *even though there be,* etc., and at the end of the clause he stops. For a moment we cannot believe it. The use of the subjunctive here, *even though there be,* is another of his fine manipulations to give us confidence in the structure of his thought. We find it very hard to believe that a man who can use the subjunctive in this noble traditional way would be capable of leaving his sentence with one end sticking out in the air, like the rope in the Indian rope trick. And yet Mr. Davies *has* left it so, and we can only accept and wonder, just as we can only accept and wonder at his giving the public his word for the authenticity of all the testimony quoted from the trials in his film, which contained a confession by Tukhachevsky imagined and written by Hollywood, at his flying back from Moscow on his second mission with the advertisement *Mission to Moscow* painted in large yellow letters in English and Russian on his plane, and at his watching with gratification in the company of Stalin and his retinue, while this film was shown in the Kremlin.

Let me finally quote a passage less distinguished by brilliance of language than by the felicity with which it mirrors the qualities of the man himself. Mr. Davies is reporting an interview with a representative of the Soviet Foreign Office, at which the trade agreement and the debts were discussed:

> *He stated that they were having difficulty, in connection with guaranteeing* $40,000,000 *of purchases in the United States. . . . I stated quite frankly, however, that while, personally, I made these admissions to him "and against interest," that* [sic] *quite as frankly I had absolutely no tolerance for a position that would haggle over an in-*

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crease of $10,000,000 *in purchases (from* $30,000,000 *to* $40,000,000) *in view of both the equities and the practicalities of this situation; that in my opinion it was not an evidence of approaching the matter in a broadminded and appreciative attitude of the position which Secretary Hull had taken so fairly and in such a large-minded way on this particular problem.*

The style here, of course, is remarkable as Mr. Davies' style always is. The superfluous *that* is good. The *broad-minded* and *large-minded* are like the flourish of persuasive hands brushing doubts and inhibitions aside; and in the next sentence but one we already see the spell that is cast by the verbal incantation, taking effect on the Soviet department head:

Mr. Neymann manifested a very fair-minded attitude in reply and stated in conclusion that he would not be disposed to quarrel with that point of view . . .

But there glints through in this passage, when the figures are named, the relentless *fortiter in rebus* which—to resort to a kind of ornament much relished by Mr. Davies—always lurks behind the *sauviter in modo*. Mr. Davies is of Welsh blood, he tells us, and, like a Welshman, he knows how to combine an elevated and shimmering eloquence with a certain subtlety of practical shrewdness. The glint is half lost in the mist; the purpose is half obscured by the shower of flattering words that, meaningless though most of them are, rather soothe us and please us as we read. These words may perhaps have made it easier for Mr. Davies, at the time of his embassy, to further the interests of the United States; but there are moments when the steely gleam that pierces from time to time the shifting lights of Mr. Davies' language, has the look of an eye fixed intently on opportunities for conspicuous self-dramatization.

EDMUND WILSON

Portrait of the Artist As a Middle Aged Man

When the "literary situation" has to be discussed, it must surely be pretty far gone. The truth is that in the last years those who have not allowed themselves to became complacent have taken to complaining about it, but rarely has the subject been aired in print; and Malcolm Cowley's recent piece in *The New Republic* on "American Literature in Wartime" is one of the very few comments on the low state of writing today. Cowley points to such typical signs of deterioration as the enormous output — and prestige — of potboilers, and the dearth of any writing—or political thinking—that bares the more crucial experiences of the time. He attributes this decline of the creative spirit to the frustrations of the liberal mind and the eventual loss of its political faith as it became disillusioned through the Moscow Trials, the Spanish defeat, Munich, and the Stalin-Hitler Pact. And having been deprived of the enthusiasms of some enveloping

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cause, writers have withdrawn into the private imagination, which cannot but lag behind the pace of events.

With some of Cowley's diagnosis one is bound to agree. But it seems to me that both the causes and the effects of the present crisis go much deeper. What we observe today is not so much a lull in the literary life as an utter breakdown of values and distinctions and a failure of the will to independent, radical expression. Nor can one account for this cultural degeneration, as Cowley tends to, simply by the political disappointments of the last decade, for in the past the vitality of art has never been known to depend on the realizations of any radical hopes. On the contrary, the measure of vitality has been the ability of intellectuals to maintain their identity and their traditions regardless of the political situation.

In the last few years, however, most American writers have done nothing so much as display their capacity to conform, by draping themselves in the official doctrines of All-American anti-fascism and knuckling under to the chest-thumping nationalism now rampant. There is, perhaps, as much native talent at work today as in the past, but apparently it has been drained off by the pieties of the war spirit, leaving any against-the-stream creative effort to a few lonely figures content to remain outside the sway of literary opinion.

The rediscovery of America has become practically an occupational disease not only of popular writers and reviewers but also of people who once had at least one foot in the movements of literary revolt. The phenomenon is actually too widespread to cite, but the effects are evident even in a number of ostensibly serious studies, such as Ferner Nuhn's *The Wind Blows from the East* and Maxwell Geismar's *Writers in Transition*, in which the worth of American authors is tested largely by their devotion to the native land. And this impulse to boost our national stock has been accompanied by a wave of anti-intellectualism that threatens to destroy the still remaining traces of the radical and modernist spirit that developed after the last war. True enough, a guilt feeling on the part of writers who strayed too far from the popular mind and a tendency to retire into the security of the American past have been ever present in our culture. But today this intellectual masochism has become almost the norm of the literary man, so that the traditional gap between official and disaffected thinking, between kitsch and literature, is closing up. Only in such a debased atmosphere can cash-and-carry writers like Saroyan and Steinbeck, for example, be treated with the respect and attention ordinarily reserved for figures of genuine distinction.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the absence of a younger generation of writers, sharing more or less a common dissidence and a common direction. By definition, the artist who sets out to advance the medium or to express new ideas is a young man at war with the existing gods and disposed to

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nurse his disaffection and sense of alienation — a zealot, we might say, of the advance guard. Thus have new literary movements come to the fore. Of late, however, the new talents that have appeared have mostly presented themselves in the image of middle-aged literary men, not too eager to differentiate themselves from the already succesful models, and ripe for the standard literary markets. Where in the past most gifted writers had to suffer their growing pains in the "little magazines" before the commercial publications would come to terms with them, if at all, today the young writer is quite ready to skip the intermediate stage. As a result, the younger talent, instead of reaching for some new forms of the imagination to generalize its experience — the experience of a generation caught between the political shocks of the thirties and the uprootings of the war — has taken to matching skills with the more popular authors. No wonder that immemorial genre, the slice of life, which proceeds by simple addition of events to characters, has become the standard recipe for literary composition. And as every magazine editor knows, even the presumably more advanced specimens of writing are for the most part but the trophies of modernism, handed down from the twenties. There are, to be sure, some notable exceptions — offhand one might mention Karl Schapiro, Randall Jarrell, Mary McCarthy, Elizabeth Bishop, Saul Bellow, H. J. Kaplan, Isaac Rosenfeld—but these are isolated figures, lacking the *élan* and confidence of a movement.

These are some of the more telling symptoms — all obviously of a piece — of intellectual disruption. And while no cultural situation can be defined in purely political terms, it is clear that American writing has been thrown off balance by the events of the last decade. Thus there was the political fling of the thirties when so many established as well as young writers leaped to the cause of communism and proletarian art, outdoing each other in the extravaganzas of political writing. Hence it was almost inevitable that they should soon find themselves in the position of a truly "lost generation", unable to adjust to a new climate, once the Stalinists, who sponsored the new literary movement, removed its revolutionary props. Some gifted figures simply lost their bearings, retiring from both literature and politics, while those faithfuls who veered left and right with the Stalinists were transformed into political automata who found it just as gratifying to underwrite the democratic myth as to agitate for the socialist revolution. And the liberal mind, which had sustained itself through the faith and energy of the Stalinists, even when it kept its distance from their more extreme policies, found itself betrayed at every turn and crushed between the failures of the radical cause and the false hopes of the new gospel of compromise.

With the coming of the war, it was of course to be expected that some of the earlier radicalism should be supplanted by a patrio-

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tic and socially empty anti-fascism, absorbing practically all the intellectuals who formerly had leaned to the left. And it is clear that this transition was smoothed by the Communist Party when it provided left-wing sanctions for the scrapping of any political aims beyond the winning of the war. Nor has any other radical movement been able to gain sufficient stature to challenge the memory or the political conscience of American intellectuals and to place restraints on their tendency to make their peace with the social order and all its works. Not content to support the war simply on the grounds of expediency, they have gone the whole hog in virtually accepting the political interests of the Allied powers. Culturally and politically they have fallen in with the official jargon of the times.

How long can this last? In the modern period, literature has thrived on those contradictions in society that permit writers to express a detached and critical attitude. And it is altogether likely that the defeat of Hitler will release new forces and conflicts that are bound to shake the literary mind out of its present servility. There is some hope, too, that a generation of young writers will return from the war with a fresh image of its realities. Judging by their record, American writers can be counted on to move quickly once the social mood shifts. But even if writers change their opinions quickly, the literary process, unfortunately, moves slowly.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

Virgil and War

In connection with a certain project I am re-studying Latin. I once knew a little of the language; but it has since disappeared, declensions, conjugations, rules, exceptions and all, into the limbo of unused erudition. I doubt that at present I could even read at sight that beginner's classic, "Cornelia's Jewels." So I have had to start with the very first sentence in the grammar, the one which reads: "The Latin alphabet is the same as the English, except that Latin has no 'w'."

There have evidently been many recent developments in the teaching of Latin. In the bookstores are volumes incorporating "improved techniques for study" and various novelty features designed to capture a pupil's interest. Unfortunately the newer editions show little advance in esthetic quality. I am studying Latin out of a modern school *Aeneid* which still prints reproductions of such musty works as "The Trojan Horse" by Henri Paul Motte and "Roman Ladies at the Tombs of Their Ancestors" by Hector Le Roux. But in other ways there are great improvements. My *Aeneid* is known as "The Visible Vocabulary Edition." Its attraction consists in its printing all together on the same page text, glossary, and notes on constructions. The advantages of this plan are obvious. The vocabularies at the foot of each page give the English equivalent for every single Latin word on that page, no matter how many times the word may have been given before. No penalty for forgetting! As someone said to

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me of this edition, "Such magnanimity from editors is only possible in the case of a study which is completely dead." The "visible vocabulary" idea is, I suppose, patented.

With such a helpful text and with Mackail's translation also at hand, deciphering the *Aeneid* is not unpleasant. You are free to enjoy the verse and to speculate about the poet, and Virgil is an intriguing poet. I wonder in particular how this temperamental writer ever came to serve the neoclassic centuries as a model of literary decorum. It is true that elements of the "classical" formula are present in him: religious and political orthodoxy, literary traditionalism. Yet what chiefly comes through to a modern reader is the frank riotousness of his sensibility and the urgent nature of his unconscious life. In understanding Virgil the categories of romanticism and classicism, obsolete in any case, are of no help. Nor does the modern composite term, "metaphysical," serve here either.

The *Aeneid* is a highly emotional and emotive poem. In contrast to the slow-paced *Iliad* it unwinds at a speed which is almost hysterical. And while Homer has his apocalyptic passages, as Achilles' combat with the River Xanthus, Virgil seems positively to exult in images of panic and destruction: storms, shipwrecks, meteors, people shrieking and sweating and swooning, Troy burning, women running mad. But Virgil is equally attracted by visions of things immobile and paradisaical. Besides the imagery of terror and flight there is in the *Aeneid* a complementary imagery of repose, a world of groves and caverns and forest-fringed waters and subterranean fastnesses, with the primeval Tiber flowing benignly through it all. Strongly nostalgic, this image-stream is the fruit of reverie as the other is of nightmare and it is compensatory in effect. It calls up sentiments of peace —a peace not only pre-historical but pre-natal.

Moreover, Virgil seems to be tormented by, on the one hand, bad conscience, and on the other a sense of the cruelty of the world. Guilt and malignity are everywhere in the *Aeneid*. Juno is a far more melodramatic agent of persecution than any in Homer. As for the virtuous Aeneas, he seems to stagger under the weight of a conscience as oppressive as the body of his aged father, whom he carries on his shoulders out of fallen Troy. Aeneas knows guilt over Creusa and Dido; the poem expresses guilt for the devastation of Carthage and for Roman militarism generally.

In his *Study of History* (vol. V) A. J. Toynbee discusses Virgil as an example of the conscience-stricken Roman elite of the Augustan period. Toynbee quotes the amazing passage in the *Georgics* which begins, *Ergo intersesse paribus concurrere telis*. In Mackail's translation the passage reads as follows:

> Therefore a second time Philippi saw Roman lines meet in shock of equal arms, and our lord forbade not that Emathia and the broad plains of Haemus should twice be fattened with

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our blood. Surely a time too shall come when in those borders the husbandsman, as his crooked plow labors the soil, will find spears eaten away with scaling rust, or strike on helms his heavy mattock, and marvel at mighty bones dug up from their tombs. Gods of our fathers, of our country, and thou Romulus, and Vesta, mother who keepest Tuscan Tiber and the Roman Palatine, forbid not at least that this our prince may succour a ruined world! Long enough already has our life-blood recompensed Laomedon's perjury at Troy; long already the heavenly palace, O Caesar, grudges thee to us, and murmurs that thou shouldst care for human triumphs, where right and wrong are confounded, where all these wrongs cover the world, where wickedness is manifold and the plow's meed of honour is gone; the fields thicken with weeds, for the tillers are marched away, and bent sickles are forged into the stiff swordblade: here the Euphrates, there G e r m a n y heaves with war; neighboring cities rush into arms one against another over broken laws: the merciless W a r - G o d rages through all the world: even as when chariots bursting from their barriers swerve out of the course, and, vainly tugging at the curb, the driver is swept on by his horses, and the car hearkens not to the rein.

This passage, says Toynbee, is "a prayer for delivery from a torturing sense of drift which is conveyed in the last three lines by one of the most vivid strokes of Virgil's art. The prayer takes the form of a confession of sin; and, though the sin from which the poet implores heaven for release is nominally an 'original sin' inherited from Laomedon [king of Troy and Priam's father, a notorious perjurer] . . . the tremendous *ergo* which is the first word of the first line and the key word of the whole passage tells the reader that the sin which the Romans were expiating in Virgil's day was really the sin which they themselves had been committing during the two-centuries-long rake's progress upon which they entered when they plunged into the Hannibalic War . . . "

But Virgil had hopes that good would come of all this evil. Just as modern philosophers of nationalism or of class struggle pretend that their nation or their class has a benevolent "mission" to perform in connection with its proposed domination of the world, so Virgil argues that through universal war Rome will establish universal peace. I am thinking of the well-known passage in the *Aeneid* in which Jupiter prophesies the Pax Romana. "The dreadful steel-clenched gates of War shall be shut fast; inhuman fury, his hands bound behind him with an hundred rivets of brass, shall sit within on murderous weapons, shrieking with ghastly blood-stained lips." Such was Virgil's theory, but considering his calamity-haunted imagination, one wonders to what extent he believed in it.

F. W. Dupee

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The Rukeyser Imbroglio

It is a symptom of the current collapse of decency that a magazine as meaningful, on the whole, as the PARTISAN REVIEW could print in its fall issue the piece entitled "Grandeur and Misery of a Poster Girl." In the very same issue, apropos of the *school* of *rudeness,* these words appeared: "The exquisite aristocratic tact which subtly specified the circumstances under which things could be called by their right names is today something we know about largely from books, not from anybody's public behavior." I am grateful for the assurance that we can now call a spade a spade; for while I do not claim to be endowed with exquisite aristocratic tact, I do not ordinarily like to refer to the verbal efforts of my fellow-writers as "incredible vulgarity," or "vicious distortion," or "stupid malice." But in this case the performance in question has already specified, and none too subtly, the circumstances under which it can be called by these very names.

The "incredible vulgarity" with which this comment on Muriel Rukeyser is drenched is of course a direct outgrowth of its "vicious distortion." And this, I am forced to conclude, was dictated by "stupid malice." For if there were any real truth, or consistent critical justice, in this outburst, one could forgive the tone. And it is hard to see, in the light of the actual facts, how anyone who was *not* animated by "stupid malice" could fail to treat Muriel Rukeyser's work with some real seriousness, regard for truth, and critical justice—even though he might disagree with her viewpoint, and perhaps find it imperfectly articulate. But it seems that the author (or authors?) of this outburst had some grace—some remaining capacity to blush; for the piece is the only thing in the magazine which is unsigned. (It is hard to believe that R.P.S. could refer to the editors of so responsible a publication, and I do not believe it.)

I am not primarily concerned to defend Miss Rukeyser's work. She is young, vital, and an indubitable talent—a formidable talent. Yet it is necessary to point out that this attack is not directed against her work so much as it is against her motives, her intellectual and social integrity; the implication throughout is that she is a shifty opportunist. True—like scores of other artists and intellectuals, she has sympathized with the left, and used social material and working-class themes in some of her works; true—she has likewise groped for symbols for the buried life; true also—her more ambitious pieces have often failed to achieve that unity of thought, image, and passion which is the mark of the very greatest poetry; true—she has been very much interested in the "timely" as well as the timeless. It is also true that she has lectured and written about the creative spirit; that she has seen that there *are* relationships of the most exciting sort between poetry, science, and—yes—even mysticism; and that as a responsible intellectual as well as poet she has always been concerned with "meanings." It is even true—believe it or not—that a person

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like this was sought out by the OWI for a responsible post, which she soon resigned, sick at heart because the war was increasingly "unconscious," and because our business and political leaders were more concerned with *stifling* the meanings and values involved than they were with educating the American people to the real issues of the struggle. And finally—it is true that she has received two awards and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

In these acknowledgments of truth I have patiently summarized, one by one, the very points which this unspeakable attack has used to slur Miss Rukeyser—indicating by way of tone and sneering innuendo, misleading quotations and unsupported "critical" descriptions of her style, that she is intellectually dishonest, opportunistically looking for a "band-wagon" to jump onto, and waiting for the post of Librarian of Congress. It is astonishing, and in fact sickening, that a magazine devoted to politics *and* culture, the social *and* the spiritual, freedom from party tyranny *and* political action that is meaningful in human terms (do I distort your policy?) should permit this vicious distortion of a poet's aim and work to appear in its columns. I should understand the scurrilous nature of the attack much better if PARTISAN REVIEW were still a Trotskyist publication; but in a matter of fact, politically, Miss Rukeyser's position on the war is not too far from that of Sidney Hook, whom you so esteem. Nor has she disregarded her "previous commitments," as the piece puts it, any more than many another honest intellectual who has changed his mind more than once in the last ten years. What commitments does a poet have, indeed, except to the principle of creative growth?

It is unquestionably true that an attitude so complex and inclusive as the one Muriel Rukeyser has consistently tried to express is an attitude which requires the greatest discipline, poetic and intellectual, to express *clearly*. No one who believes in the value of her work—least of all the poet herself—would claim that she has succeeded, as yet, in integrating her lively energy, curiosity, and expressive talent into the disciplined form which alone would be able to convey this attitude completely. But who in this age of small or fragmentary talents has succeeded? Certainly Muriel Rukeyser has not altogether failed. Men of science, scholars, liberals, students, men in the armed forces —even a good many leftists of several shades—and other intelligent people who do not write for PARTISAN REVIEW, have been stirred by her verse and stimulated by her prose; for no matter what her faults are, as a writer, such people know that they spring from an intuition of the relationships between orders of intellectual, emotional, and social experience which have been kept separate too long. And this is what people are looking for —this effort to link—this concern, precisely, with "meanings."

Neither as a poet nor as a person does Miss Rukeyser need any impassioned defense in these pages. But PARTISAN REVIEW might well take itself to task, as a magazine

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devoted to serious criticism and intellectual candor, for the gross error involved in printing this irresponsible attack. If the editors feel that the time is already ripe for a revaluation of Muriel Rukeyser, if they really feel that she has been over-rated as a poet, and that she can be proved imaginatively flawed and intellectually dishonest—on the basis of her work, which is of course the only basis possible—then a serious critique is in order, based on the *truth,* and written with justice, intelligence, and honest principles. But not this set of illogical accusations, this medley of non-sequiturs, this tearing out of context; not the nauseating bad taste and pure venom of the last paragraph of this "Poster Girl" piece. REBECCA PITTS

Comment: Besides the communication from Miss Pitts, we have received letters from Miss Babette Deutsch and Mr. Thomas D. Mabry sharply protesting the publication of the article, "Grandeur and Misery of a Poster Girl." All three correspondents cover much the same ground; and if we have chosen to give space only to Miss Pitts, it is because her statement is the longest, the most comprehensive and also the most vehement.

Miss Pitts expresses her indignation in a tone of innocence and benevolence. But the fact is that in the extremity of her innocence and benevolence she fails to answer *specifically* any of the points made about Miss Rukeyser. Generalities about Miss Rukeyser's seriousness and good intentions scarcely persuade us of the value of such works as *Willard Gibbs* and *Wake Island.* In our opinion both works are obvious examples of that neo-American inspirational literature which is the product not of a healthy national consciousness but of intellectual demoralization. In *Wake Island* Miss Rukeyser celebrated the battle fought by the marines in exactly the same style and seemingly from the same point of view as that recorded in her poems about the Spanish Loyalists. Now we submit that regardless whether one is "for" or "against" the present war, there is still a world of difference between the anti-fascist struggle of the Spanish people and the war now being waged in the Pacific. To change one's mind is one thing, but to show oneself unaware of the historical meaning and tragic implications of certain changes of mind is something else again. Surely it is possible to support the military war against Hitler for reasons of political strategy, as Sidney Hook and many other leftists do, without succumbing to the coarse political rhetoric of the "crusade for democracy." Nor is Miss Pitts any more plausible in her defense of Miss Rukeyser's piece, "Words and Images," a piece about war-posters all the assumptions of which prove her adherence to what Randolph Bourne, writing during the last war, called the "new orthodoxies of propaganda."

Miss Pitts is shocked by the virulence of the satire directed against Miss Rukeyser. But is not her shock symptomatic of the gentility by which American literary life has been ruled in recent years? For the the more murderous the realities

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that surround us, the more timorous our intellectuals become and the more automatic, almost, their adjustment to the current formulas of consolation. The satire to which Miss Pitts takes exception violated the code of "niceness" and urbanity cultivated in the academic and liberal magazines. This code is nothing else than the code of mediocrity, and its prevalence at the present time is sufficient proof of the creative debility of the period we live in.—*The Editors.*

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